The Builders

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THE BUILDERS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ANCIENT LAW, THE
BATTLE-GROUND, THE
DELIVERANCE, THE
FREEMAN AND OTHER POEMS, THE
LIFE AND GABRIELLA
MILLER OF OLD CHURCH, THE
ROMANCE OF A PLAIN MAN, THE
VIRGINIA
VOICE OF THE PEOPLE, THE
WHEEL OF LIFE

THE BUILDERS

BY
ELLEN GLASGOW

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BOOK FIRST
APPEARANCES

THE BUILDERS

CHAPTER I

Caroline

The train was late that day, and when the old leather mail pouch was brought in, dripping wet, by Jonas, the negro driver, Mrs. Meade put down the muffler she was knitting, and received it reluctantly.

"At least there aren't any bills at this time of the month," she observed, with the manner of one who has been designed by Providence to repel disaster.

While she unbuckled the clammy straps, her full, round face, which was still fresh and pretty in spite of her seventy years, shone like an auspicious moon in the dusky glow of the fire. Since wood was scarce, and this particular strip of southside Virginia grew poorer with each year's harvest, the only fire at The Cedars was the one in "the chamber," as Mrs. Meade's bedroom was called. It was a big, shabby room, combining, as successfully as its owner, an aspect of gaiety with a conspicuous absence of comforts. There were no curtains at the windows, and the rugs, made from threadbare carpets, had faded to indeterminate patterns; but the cracked mahogany belonged to a good period, and if the colours had worn dim, they were harmonious and restful. The house, though scarred, still held to its high standards. The spirit of the place was the spirit of generous poverty, of cheerful fortitude.

The three girls on the hearthrug, knitting busily for the War Relief Association, were so much alike in colouring, shape, and feature, that it was difficult at a casual glance to distinguish Maud, who was almost, if not quite, a beauty, from Margaret and Diana, who were merely pretty and intelligent. They were all natural, kind-hearted girls, who had been trained from infancy to make the best of things and to laugh when they were hurt. From the days when they had played with ears of corn instead of dolls, they had acquired ingenuity and philosophy. For Mrs. Meade, who derived her scant income from a plantation cultivated "on shares" by negro tenants, had brought up her girls to take life gaily, and to rely on their own resourcefulness rather than on fortuitous events.

"Here is a nice fat letter for Caroline, and it looks as if it weren't an advertisement." With one plump hand she held out the letter, while she handed the dripping mail bag to Jonas. "Bring some wood for the fire, Jonas, and be sure to shut the door after you."

"Dar ain' no mo' wood, ole Miss."

For an instant Mrs. Meade stopped to think. "Well, the garden fence is falling down by the smoke-house. Split up some of the rails. Here is your letter, Caroline."

A woman's figure, outlined against the rocking branches of an old cedar beyond the window, turned slowly toward the group on the hearthrug. In Caroline's movements, while she lingered there for a moment, there was something gallant and free and spirited, which was a part of the world outside and the swaying boughs. Though she was older than the three girls by the fire, she was young with an illusive and indestructi-

ble grace of the soul. At thirty-two, in spite of the stern sweetness about her thin red lips, and the defiant courage which flashed now and then from the shadowy pallor of her face, one felt that the flame and ardour of her glance flowed not from inward peace, but from an unconquerable and adventurous spirit. Against the grey rain her face seemed the face of some swiftly changing idea, so expressive of an intangible beauty was the delicate curve of the cheek and the broad, clear forehead beneath the dark hair, which grew low in a "widow's peak" above the arched eyebrows and the vivid blue of the eyes. If there was austerity in the lines of her mouth, her eyes showed gaiety, humour, and tenderness. Long ago, before the wreck of her happiness, her father, who had a taste for the striking in comparisons, had said that Caroline's eyes were like bluebirds flying.

The letter could wait. She was not interested in letters now, rarely as they came to her. It was, she knew, only the call to a patient, and after nearly eight years of nursing, she had learned that nothing varied the monotonous personalities of patients. They were all alike, united in their dreadful pathos by the condition of illness—and as a mere matter of excitement there was little to choose between diphtheria and pneumonia. Yet if it were a call, of course she would go, and her brief vacation would be over. Turning away from the firelight, she deferred as long as possible the descent from her thoughts to the inevitable bondage of the actuality.

Beyond the window, veiled in rain, she could see the pale quivering leaves of the aspens on the lawn, and the bend in the cedar avenue, which led to the big white

gate and the private road that ran through the farm until it joined the turnpike at the crossroads. Ever since she was born, it seemed to her, for almost thirty-two years, she had watched like this for something that might come up that long empty road. Even in the years that she had spent away, she had felt that her soul waited there, tense and expectant, overlooking the bend in the avenue and the white gate, and then the road over which "the something different," if it came at all, must come at last to The Cedars. Nothing, not change, not work, not travel, could detach the invisible tendrils of her life from the eager, brooding spirit of the girl who had once watched there at the window. She had been watching—watching—she remembered, when the letter that broke her heart had come in the old mail pouch, up the road beyond, and through the gate, and on into the shadows and stillness of the avenue. That was how the blow had come to her, without warning, while she waited full of hope and expectancy and the ardent sweetness of dreams.

"My poor child, your heart is broken!" her mother had cried through her tears, and the girl, with the letter still in her hands, had faced her defiantly.

"Yes, but my head and my hands are whole," she had replied with a laugh.

Then, while the ruins of her happiness lay at her feet, she began rebuilding her house of life with her head and her hands. She would accept failure on its own terms, completely, exultantly, and by the very audacity of her acceptance, she would change defeat into victory. She would make something out of nothing; she would wring peace, not from joy, but from the heart of an incredible cruelty; she would build with

courage, not with gladness, but she would build her house toward the stars.

"There must be something one can live on besides love," she thought, "or half the world would go famished."

"Come and read your letter, Caroline," called Maud, as she reached the end of a row. "There isn't anything for the rest of us."

"I am so afraid it is a call, dear," said Mrs. Meade; and then, as Caroline left the window and passed into the firelight, the old lady found herself thinking a little vaguely, "Poor child, the hard work is beginning to show in her face—but she has never been the same since that unfortunate experience. I sometimes wonder why a just Providence lets such things happen." Aloud she added, while her beaming face clouded slightly, "I hope and pray that it isn't anything catching."

As Caroline bent over the letter, the three younger girls put down their knitting and drew closer, while their charming faces, brown, flushed, and sparkling, appeared to catch and hold the glow of the flames. They were so unlike Caroline, that she might have been mistaken, by a stranger, for a woman of a different race. While she bent there in the firelight, her slender figure, in its cambric blouse and skirt of faded blue serge, flowed in a single lovely curve from her drooping dark head to her narrow feet in their worn russet shoes.

"It is from an old friend of yours, mother," she said presently, "Mrs. Colfax."

"Lucy Colfax! Why, what on earth is she writing to you about? I hope there isn't anything wrong with her."

"Read it aloud, Caroline," said Diana. "Mother, this fire will go out before Jonas can fix it."

"He has to split the wood, dear. Look out on the back porch and see if you can find some chips. They'll be nice and dry." Mrs. Meade spoke with authority, for beneath her cheerful smile there was the heart of a fighter, and like all good fighters, she fought best when she was driven against the wall. "Now, Caroline, I am listening."

"She wants me to take a case. It sounds queer, but I'll read you what she says. 'Dear Caroline'—she calls me 'Caroline.'"

"That's natural, dear. We were like sisters, and perhaps she took a fancy to you the time she met you in Richmond. It would be just like her to want to do something for you." The sprightly old lady, who was constitutionally incapable of seeing any prospect in subdued colours, was already weaving a brilliant tapestry of Caroline's future.

"'Dear Caroline:

"'My cousin, Angelica Blackburn, has asked me to recommend a trained nurse for her little girl, who is delicate, and I am wondering if you would care to take the case. She particularly wishes a self-reliant and capable person, and Doctor Boland tells me you have inherited your mother's sweet and unselfish nature (I don't see how he knows. Everybody is unselfish in a sick-room. One has to be.)'"

"Well, I'm sure you have a lovely nature," replied Mrs. Meade tenderly. "I was telling the girls only yesterday that you never seemed to think of yourself a minute." In her own mind she added, "Any other girl would have been embittered by that un-

fortunate experience" (the phrase covered Caroline's blighted romance) "and it shows how much character she has that she was able to go on just as if nothing had happened. I sometimes think a sense of humour does as much for you as religion."

"'I remember my poor father used to say,'" Caroline read on smoothly, "'that in hard dollars and cents Carrie Warwick's disposition was worth a fortune.'"

"That's very sweet of Lucy," murmured Mrs. Meade deprecatingly.

"'As you are the daughter of my old friend, I feel I ought not to let you take the case without giving you all the particulars. I don't know whether or not you ever heard of David Blackburn—but your mother will remember his wife, for she was a Fitzhugh, the daughter of Champ Fitzhugh, who married Bessie Ludwell.'"

"Of course I remember Bessie. She was my bosom friend at Miss Braxton's school in Petersburg."

"Let me go on, mother darling. If you interrupt me so often I'll never get to the interesting part."

"Very well, go on, my dear, but it does seem just like Providence. When the flour gave out in the barrel last night, I knew something would happen." For Mrs. Meade had begun life with the shining certainty that "something wonderful" would happen to her in the future, and since she was now old and the miracle had never occurred, she had transferred her hopes to her children. Her optimism was so elastic that it stretched over a generation without breaking.

"'Mrs. Blackburn—Angelica Fitzhugh, she was—though her name is really Anna Jeannette, and they called her Angelica as a child because she looked so like an angel—well, Mrs. Blackburn is the cousin I spoke of,

whose little girl is so delicate.' She is all tangled up, isn't she, mother?"

"Lucy always wrote like that," said Mrs. Meade. "As a girl she was a scatterbrain."

"'I do not know exactly what is wrong with the child,'" Caroline resumed patiently, "'but as long as you may go into the family, I think I ought to tell you that I have heard it whispered that her father injured her in a fit of temper when she was small.'"

"How horrible!" exclaimed Diana. "Caroline, you couldn't go there!"

"'She has never been able to play with other children, and Doctor Boland thinks she has some serious trouble of the spine. I should not call her a disagreeable child, or hard to manage, just delicate and rather whining—at least she is whenever I see her, which is not often. Her mother is one of the loveliest creatures on earth, and I can imagine no greater privilege than living in the house with her. She is far from strong, but she seems never to think of her health, and all her time is devoted to doing good. Doctor Boland was telling me yesterday that he had positively forbidden her undertaking any more charitable work. He says her nerves are sensitive, and that if she does not stop and rest she will break down sooner or later. I cannot help feeling —though of course I did not say this to him—that her unhappy marriage is the cause of her ill health and her nervousness. She was married very young, and they were so desperately poor that it was a choice between marriage and school teaching. I cannot blame anybody for not wanting to teach school, especially if they have as poor a head for arithmetic as I have, but if I had been Angelica, I should have taught

until the day of my death before I should have married David Blackburn. If she had not been so young it would be hard to find an excuse for her. Of course he has an immense fortune, and he comes of a good old family in southside Virginia—your mother will remember his father—but when you have said that, you have said all there is to his credit. The family became so poor after the war that the boy had to go to work while he was scarcely more than a child, and I believe the only education he has ever had was the little his mother taught him, and what he managed to pick up at night after the day's work was over. In spite of his birth he has had neither the training nor the advantages of a gentleman, and nothing proves this so conclusively as the fact that, though he was brought up a Democrat, he voted the Republican ticket at the last two Presidential elections. There is something black in a man, my dear old father used to say, who goes over to the negroes——'"

"Of course Lucy belongs to the old school," said Mrs. Meade. "She talks just as her father used to—but I cannot see any harm in a man's voting as he thinks right."

"'I am telling you all this, my dear Caroline, in order that you may know exactly what the position is. The salary will be good, just what you make in other cases, and I am sure that Angelica will be kindness itself to you. As for David Blackburn, I scarcely think he will annoy you. He treats his wife abominably, I hear, but you can keep out of his way, and it is not likely that he will be openly rude to you when you meet. The papers just now are full of him because, after going over to the Republicans, he does not seem satisfied with their ways.

"'Give my fondest love to your mother, and tell her how thankful I am that she and I are not obliged to live through a second war. One is enough for any woman, and I know she will agree with me—especially if she could read some of the letters my daughter writes from France. I feel every hour I live how thankful we ought to be to a kind Providence for giving us a President who has kept us out of this war. Robert says if there were not any other reason to vote for Mr. Wilson, that would be enough—and with Mr. Hughes in the White House who knows but we should be in the midst of it all very soon. David Blackburn is making fiery speeches about the duty of America's going in, but some men can never have enough of a fight, and I am sure the President knows what is best for us, and will do what he thinks is right.

"'Be sure to telegraph me if you can come, and I will meet your train in Angelica's car.

"'Your affectionate friend,

LUCY COLFAX.

"'I forgot to tell you that Doctor Boland says I am prejudiced against David Blackburn, but I do not think I am. I tell only what I hear, for the stories are all over Richmond.'"

As Caroline finished the letter she raised her head with a laugh.

"It sounds like a good place, and as for Bluebeard—well, he can't kill me. I don't happen to be his wife."

Her figure, with its look of relaxed energy, of delicate yet inflexible strength, straightened swiftly, while her humorous smile played like an edge of light over her features. The old lady, watching her closely, remembered the way Caroline's dead father had laughed in his

youth. "She is as like him as a girl could be," she thought, with her eyes on her daughter's wide white brow, which had always seemed to her a shade too strong and thoughtful for a woman. Only the softly curving line of hair and the large radiant eyes kept the forehead from being almost masculine. "She might be as pretty as Maud if only she had more colour and her brow and chin were as soft as her eyes. Her mouth isn't full and red like Maud's, and her nose isn't nearly so straight, but the girls' father used to say that the best nose after all is a nose that nobody remembers." Smiling vaguely at the recollection, Mrs. Meade readjusted her mental processes with an effort, and took up her work. "I hope Lucy is prejudiced against him," she observed brightly. "You know her father was once Governor of Virginia, and she can't stand anybody who doesn't support the Democratic Party."

"But she says he treats his wife abominably, and that it's all over Richmond!" exclaimed Maud indignantly.

Before this challenge Mrs. Meade quailed. "If she is prejudiced about one thing, she may be about others," she protested helplessly.

"Well, he can't hurt me," remarked Caroline with firmness. "People can't hurt you unless you let them." Nothing, she felt, in an uncertain world was more certain than this—no man could ever hurt her again. She knew life now; she had acquired experience; she had learned philosophy; and no man, not even Bluebeard himself, could ever hurt her again.

"There was something about him in the paper this morning," said Margaret, the serious and silent one of the family. "I didn't read it, but I am sure that I saw

his name in the headlines. It was about an independent movement in politics."

"Well, I'm not afraid of independent movements," rejoined Caroline gaily, "and I'm not like Mrs. Colfax—for I don't care what he does to the Democratic Party."

"I hate to have you go there, my dear," Mrs. Meade's voice shook a little, "but, of course, you must do what you think right." She remembered the empty flour barrel, and the falling fence rails, and the habit of a merciful Providence that invariably came to her aid at the eleventh hour. Perhaps, after all, there was a design working through it, she reflected, as she recovered her sprightliness, and Providence had arranged the case to meet her necessities. "It seems disagreeable, but one never knows," she added aloud.

"It isn't the first time I've had a disagreeable case, mother. One can't nurse seven years and see only the pleasant side of people and things."

"Yes, I know, my child, I know. You have had so much experience." She felt quite helpless before the fact of her daughter's experience. "Only if he really does ill treat his wife, and you have to see it——"

"If I see it, perhaps I can stop it. I suppose even Bluebeard might have been stopped if anybody had gone about it with spirit. It won't be my first sudden conversion." Her eyes were still laughing, but her mouth was stern, and between the arched black eyebrows three resolute little lines had appeared. Before her "unfortunate experience," Mrs. Meade thought sadly, there had been no grimness in Caroline's humour.

"You have a wonderful way of bringing out the good in people, Caroline. Your Uncle Clarence was telling

me last Sunday that he believed you could get the best out of anybody."

"Then granting that Bluebeard has a best, I'd better begin to dig for it as soon as I get there."

"I am glad you can take it like that. If you weren't so capable, so resourceful, I'd never be easy about you a minute, but you are too intelligent to let yourself get into difficulties that you can't find a way out of." The old lady brightened as quickly as she had saddened. After all, if Caroline had been merely an ordinary girl she could never have turned to nursing so soon after the wreck of her happiness. "If a man had broken my heart when I was a girl, I believe I should have died of it," she told herself. "Certainly, I should never have been able to hold up my head and go on laughing like that. I suppose it was pride that kept her up, but it is queer the way that pride affects people so differently. Now a generation ago pride would not have made a girl laugh and take up work. It would have killed her." And there flashed through her thoughts, with the sanguine irrelevance of her habit of mind, "What I have never understood is how any man could go off with a little yellow-haired simpleton like that after knowing Caroline. Yet, I suppose, as Clarence said, if she hadn't been a simpleton, it would have been that much worse."

"Well, I'm going," said Caroline so briskly that her mother and sisters looked at her in surprise. "Jonas will have to saddle Billy and take the telegram to the station, and then you can stop knitting and help me finish those caps. This is my war and I'm going to fight it through to the end."

She went out with the telegram, and a little later

when she came back and turned again to the window, Mrs. Meade saw that her eyes were shining. After all, it looked sometimes as if Caroline really liked a battle. Always when things went wrong or appeared disastrous, this shining light came to her eyes.

Outside an eddying wind was driving the rain in gusts up the avenue, and the old cedar dashed its boughs, with a brushing sound, against the blurred window panes. As Caroline stood there she remembered that her father had loved the cedar, and there drifted into her thoughts the words he had spoken to her shortly before his death. "I haven't much to leave you, daughter, but I leave you one good thing—courage. Never forget that it isn't the victory that matters, it is the fight."

She heard Mrs. Meade telling Jonas, who was starting to the station, that he must haul a load of wood from Pine Hill when the rain was over, and while she listened, it seemed to her that she had never really known her mother until this instant—that she had never understood her simple greatness. "She has fought every minute," she thought, "she has had a hard life, and yet no one would know it. It has not kept her from being sweet and gay and interested in every one else. Even now in that calico dress, with an apron on, she looks as if she were brimming with happiness." Out of the wreck of life, out of poverty and sacrifice and drudgery, she realized that her mother had stood for something fine and clear and permanent—for an ideal order. She had never muddled things under the surface; she had kept in touch with realities; she had looked always through the changing tissue of experience to the

solid structure of life. Like the old house she had held through all vicissitudes to her high standards.

Then her thoughts left her mother, and she faced the unknown future with the defiant courage she had won from disillusionment. "If we were not so poor I'd go to France," she reflected, "but how could they possibly do without the hundred dollars a month I can earn?" No, whatever happened she must stick to her task, and her task was keeping the roof from falling in over her mother and the girls. After a month's rest at The Cedars, she would start again on the round of uninspiring patients and tedious monotony. The place Mrs. Colfax offered her seemed to her uninteresting and even sordid, and yet she knew that nothing better awaited her. She hated darkness and mystery, and the house into which she was going appeared to her to be both dark and mysterious. She was sure of her own strength; she had tested her courage and her endurance, and she was not afraid; yet for some vague and inexplicable reason she shrank from the position she had accepted. Mrs. Colfax's picture of the situation she thought tinged with melodrama, and her honest and lucid intelligence despised the melodramatic. They might all have been on the stage—the good wife, the brutal husband, and the delicate child; they seemed to her as unrelated to actual life as the sombre ghost that stalked through Hamlet.

"Angelica! It is a lovely name," she mused, seizing upon the one charming thing in Mrs. Colfax's description, "I wonder what she is like?" Fair, graceful, suffering, she saw this unknown woman against the background of the unhappy home, in an atmosphere of mystery and darkness. "She must be weak," she

thought. "If she were not weak, she would not let him hurt her." And she longed to pour some of her own strength of will, her own independence and determination and philosophy, into the imaginary figure of Mrs. Blackburn. "It may be that I can help her. If I can only help her a little, it will all be worth while."

She tried presently to think of other things—of the caps she must finish, of the uniforms she had intended to make during her vacation, of the piece of white lawn she must cut up into kerchiefs, of the mending she would ask the girls to do for her before they went to bed. There was so much to occupy her time and her thoughts in the one evening that was left to her—yet, do what she would—look where she pleased—the sweet veiled image of Mrs. Blackburn floated to her through the twilight, up the long, dim road and round the bend in the avenue—as if this stranger with the lovely name were the "something different" she had waited for in the past. By a miracle of imagination she had transferred this single character into actual experience. The sense of mystery was still there, but the unreality had vanished. It was incredible the way a woman whose face she had never seen had entered into her life. "Why, she is more real than anything," she thought in surprise. "She is more real even than the war."

For the war had not touched her. She stood secure, enclosed, protected from disaster, in her little green corner of southside Virginia. Her personal life had not been overpowered and submerged in the current of impersonal forces. The age of small things still surrounded her—but the quiver and vibration of great movements, of a world in dissolution, the subdued, insistent undercurrent of new spiritual energies in ac-

tion—these were reaching her, with the ebb and flow of psychological processes, as they were reaching the Virginia in which she lived.

The world was changing—changing—while she went toward it.

CHAPTER II

The Time

At midnight, when she was alone in her room, Caroline's mind passed from an intense personal realization of the Blackburns to a broader conception of the time in which she was living—the time which this generation had helped to create, and which, like some monster of the imagination, was now devouring its happiness. She thought of her father—a man of intellectual abilities who had spent his life out of touch with his environment, in an uncongenial employment. Young as she was when he died, she had been for years the solitary confidant of his mind, for he also, like these strangers into whose lives she was about to enter, had been the victim of the illimitable and inscrutable forces which shape the thought of an age. He had been different from his generation, and because he had been different, it had destroyed him. Yet his single idea had outlived the multitudinous actions and reactions that surrounded him. He saw not to-day, but to-morrow; and though he was of another mettle from this Blackburn of whom she had been reading, he appeared now in her fancy to take a place beside him in the vivid life of the age.

The lamp was smoking, and after lowering the wick, she sat gazing into the darkness beyond the loosened shutters, which rattled when the wind shook them.

* * * * * * *

It was in the early autumn of nineteen hundred and sixteen, the moment in history when America, hesitating on the verge of war, discovered that it was no longer an Anglo-Saxon nation; that, in spite of its language and literature, its shell of customs and traditions, a new race had been created out of a complicated mass of diverse interacting sympathies, prejudices, attractions, and repulsions. Confronted now with problems demanding a definite expression of the national will, it became evident that the pioneer stock had undergone profound modifications, and that from a mingling of many strains had been born an emphatic American spirit, with aspirations essentially different from those of the races from which its lifeblood was drawn. In the arrogant vigour of youth this spirit resented any disposition on the part of its kindred to dictate or even influence its policy or its purpose.

For two years Europe had been at war. The outbreak of the struggle had come as a distant thunderbolt to a nation unaccustomed to threatening armies, and ignorant of the triumphant menace of military ideals; and stunned by a calamity which it had believed impossible, America had been inclined at first to condemn indiscriminately those who had permitted the disaster for apparently insignificant causes. There was sympathy with Belgium because it had been destroyed; with France because it had been invaded; and with England because it had worked sincerely in the interests of peace; but as early as the autumn of nineteen hundred and sixteen this sympathy was little more than uncrystallized sentiment. To the people the problem was irrelevant and disguised in words. For a century they had been taught that their geographical isolation

was indestructible, and that European history concerned them only after it had been successfully transmuted into literature. The effect of these political illusions had been accentuated by the immediate demands upon the thoughts and energies of the nation, by the adventure of conquering a rich and undeveloped continent, and by the gradual adjustment of complex institutions to a rapidly expanding social and economic life. Secure in its remoteness, the country had grown careless in its diplomacy. Commerce was felt to be vital, but foreign relations were cheerfully left to the President, with the assumption that he was acting under the special guidance of Providence, on those memorable occasions when he acted at all. With the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the spirit of the country had flamed into a passionate demand for redress or war. Then the indignation had been gradually allayed by diplomatic phrases and bewildering technicalities; and the masses of the people, busy with an extravagant war prosperity, resigned international matters into the hands of the Government, while, with an uneasy conscience but genuine American optimism, they continued actively to hope for the best.

To an aërial philosopher the Government of the hour might have appeared a composite image of the time —sentimental, evasive of realities, idealistic in speech, and materialistic in purpose and action. Dominated by a single strong intellect, it was composed mainly of men who were without knowledge of world questions or experience in world affairs. At the moment war was gathering, yet the demand for preparation was either ignored or ridiculed as hysteria.

As the national elections approached both parties

avoided the direct issue, and sought by compromise and concession to secure the support of the non-American groups. While the country waited for leadership, the leaders hesitated in the midst of conflicting currents of public sentiment, and endeavoured to win popularity through an irresolute policy of opportunism. To Virginians, who thought politically in terms of a party, the great question was resolved into a personal problem. Where the President led they would follow.

From the beginning there had been many Americans who looked beneath the shifting surface of events, and beheld in this war a challenge to the principles which are the foundation-stones of Western civilization. They realized that this was a war not of men, not of materials, but of ideals—of ideals which are deeper than nationality since they are the common heritage of the human race. They saw that the ideals assailed were the basis of American institutions, and that if they should be overthrown the American Republic could not endure. As in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the problems of European civilization were fought out in the forests of America, so to-day, they felt, the future of America would be decided on the battlefields of Europe. The cause was the cause of humanity, therefore it was America's war.

And now as the elections drew nearer, these clearer thinkers stood apart and watched the grotesque political spectacle, with its unctuous promises of "peace and prosperity," in the midst of world tragedy. Though the struggle would be close, it was already evident that the sentiment of the country was drifting, not so much toward the policies of the administration, as away from

the invectives of the opposite party. Since neither party stood for principle, nor had the courage to declare fearlessly for the maintenance of American rights, there was a measure of comfort in the reflection that, though the purposes of the Government were not wholly approved, they were at least partly known.

By the early autumn the campaign had passed through a fog of generalization and settled into a sham battle of personal and sectional issues, while in Europe the skies grew darker, and the events of the coming year gathered like vultures before the approaching storm.

And always, while America waited and watched, the forces that mould the destinies of men and of nations, were moving, profound, obscure, and impenetrable, beneath the surface of life.

* * * * * * *

Caroline's lamp flickered and went out, while her thoughts rushed back to the shelter of the house. The room was in darkness, but beyond the shutters, where the wind swept in gusts, the clouds had scattered, and a few stars were shining.

CHAPTER III

Briarlay

In the train Caroline sat straight and still, with her eyes on the landscape, which unrolled out of the golden web of the distance. Now and then, when her gaze shifted, she could see the pale oval of her face glimmering unsteadily in the window-pane, like a light that is going out slowly. Even in the glass, where her eyes were mere pools of darkness, her mouth looked sad and stern, as if it had closed over some tragic and for ever unutterable secret. It was only when one saw her eyes —those eyes which under the arch of her brows and hair made one think of bluebirds flying—it was only when their colour and radiance lighted her features, that her face melted to tenderness.

While she sat there she thought of a hundred things, yet never once did she think of herself or her own interests as the centre around which her imagination revolved. If life had repressed and denied her, it had trained her mental processes into lucid and orderly habits. Unlike most women, she had learned to think impersonally, and to think in relations. Her spirit might beat its wings against the bars of the cage, but she knew that it would never again rise, with a dart of ecstasy, to test its freedom and its flight in the sky. She had had her day of joy. It was short, and it had left only sadness, yet because she had once had it, even for so brief a time, she might be disillusioned, but she

could not feel wholly defrauded. Through that dead emotion she had reached, for an instant, the heart of life; she had throbbed with its rapture; she had felt, known, and suffered. And in confronting the illusions of life, she had found the realities. Because she had learned that thought, not emotion, is the only permanent basis of happiness, she had been able to found her house on a rock. It was worth a good deal of pain to discover that neither desire nor disappointment is among the eternal verities of experience.

To-day, as on many other days since she had passed through her training in the hospital, she was leaving home, after a vacation in which she had thought of herself scarcely a minute, for the kind of service in which she would not have time to think of herself at all. Work had been the solution of her problem, the immediate restorative; and she knew that it had helped her through the anguish, and—worse than anguish—through the bleakness of her tragedy, as nothing else could have done. "I will not sit down and think of myself," she had said over and over in those first bitter days, and in the years since then, while she was passionately rebuilding her universe, she had kept true to her resolve. She had been active always; she had never brooded among the romantic ruins of the past. If her inner life had grown indifferent, cold, and a little hard, her external sympathies had remained warm, clear, and glowing. The comfort she had denied herself, she had given abundantly to others; the strength she had not wasted in brooding, she had spent freely in a passion of service and pity. In her face there was the beauty and sweetness of a fervent, though disciplined, spirit.

"I am so sorry to leave them," she thought, with her

eyes on the amber, crimson, and purple of the forest. "Mother is no longer young. She needs all the help I can give her, and the girls have so few pleasures. I wish there was something more I could do for them. I would work my fingers to the bone to give them a little happiness." And there floated before her, against the background of the forest, a still yet swiftly fleeting vision, of the fire-lit room, with the girls gathered, knitting, on the hearthrug, and her mother turning to look at her with the good and gentle expression that shone always in her face. Beyond the window the rain fell; the cedar brushed its boughs against the panes with a sound like that of ghostly fingers; on the roof above she heard the measured dropping of acorns. In the flickering light the old mahogany gleamed with a bronze and gold lustre, and the high white bed, under its fringed Marseilles coverlet, stood, like an embodiment of peace and sleep, in the corner. "It looks so happy, so sheltered," she thought, "and yet—" she was going to add, "and yet unhappiness came up the road, from a great distance, and found me there——" but she shattered the vague idea before it formed in her mind.

At the station Mrs. Colfax was waiting, and though Caroline had seen her only once, ten years ago, she recognized her by a bird-like, pecking manner she had never forgotten. As the ruin of a famous beauty the old lady was not without historic distinction. Though she was now shrunken and withered, and strung with quaint gold chains, which rattled with echoes of an earlier period, she still retained the gracious social art of the "sixties." Her eyes, hollowed under thin grey eyebrows, were black and piercing, and her small aristo-

cratic features looked mashed, as if life had dealt them too hard a blow.

"My dear child, I should have known you anywhere, so, you see, I haven't yet lost my memory. It was years ago that I met you, wasn't it?"

A man in livery—she discovered afterwards that he was the Blackburn's footman—took her bag, and Caroline helped Mrs. Colfax out of the station and into the big limousine at the door. "It was so good of you to meet me," she said, for it was all she could think of, and to the last she had been haunted by the fear that Mr. Blackburn might decide to come for her.

"Good of me? Why, I wanted to come." As she watched Caroline's face, the old lady was thinking shrewdly, "She isn't so pretty as she used to be. I doubt if many men would think twice about her—but she has a lovely expression. I never saw a more spiritual face."

Once safely started she rambled on while the car shot into Franklin Street, and ran straight ahead in the direction of Monument Avenue.

"I always meant to meet you, and just as soon as your telegram came, I 'phoned Angelica about the car. She wanted to come down herself, but the doctor makes her lie down two hours every afternoon. Do you see that new office building at the corner? Your mother and I went to school on that spot before we boarded at Miss Braxton's in Petersburg. At that time this part of Franklin Street was very fashionable, but everything has moved west, and everybody who can afford it is building in the country. It isn't like your mother's day at all. New people have taken possession of the town, and anybody who has money

can get into society now. We are coming to Monument Avenue. All the houses are brand new, but it is nothing to the country outside. The Blackburns' place just off the River Road is the finest house anywhere about Richmond, they tell me. He built it the year before his marriage, and I remember an artist, who came down to lecture before the Woman's Club, saying to me that Briarlay was like its owner—everything big in it was good and everything little in it was bad. I don't know much about such things, but he poked fun at the fireplaces—said they were Gothic or Italian—I can't remember which—and that the house, of course, is Colonial."

A fit of coughing stopped her, and while she dived into her black silk bag for a handkerchief, Caroline asked curiously, "Has Mr. Blackburn so much money?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose he is the richest man we have here. He owns the large steel works down by the river, and he discovered some new cheap process, they say, which brought him a fortune. I remember hearing this, but I haven't much of a head for such matters. Just now he is having a good deal of trouble with his men, and I'm sure it serves him right for deserting the ways of his father, and going over to the Republicans. Charles takes up for him because David has always stood by him in business, but of course out of respect for father's memory he couldn't openly sympathize with his disloyalty."

"Does anybody follow him, or is he all alone?" inquired Caroline, less from active interest in the question than from the desire to keep the old lady animated.

"You'll have to ask Charles, and he will be delighted to answer. In this new-fangled idea about breaking the solid South—did you ever hear such stuff and nonsense?—I believe he has had a very bad influence over a number of young men. Then, of late, he has been talking extravagantly about its being our duty to go into this war—as if we had any business mixing ourselves up in other people's quarrels—and that appeals to a lot of fire-eaters and fight-lovers. Of course, a man as rich as David Blackburn will always have a trail of sycophants and addlepates at his heels. What I say is that if Providence had intended us to be in this war, we shouldn't have been given a President wise and strong enough to keep us out of it. If Mr. Wilson is elected for a second term—and my brother Charles says there isn't a doubt of it—it will be because the country feels that he has kept us out of war. There was a long editorial in the paper this morning warning us that, if Mr. Hughes is elected, we shall be fighting Germany within two months. Then think of all the destruction and the dreadful high taxes that would follow——"

"But I thought there was a great deal of war spirit here? At home we work all the time for the Allies."

"Oh, there is, there is. Angelica is president or chairman of two or three societies for helping the wounded, and they even made me head of something—I never can remember the name of it—but it has to do with Belgian orphans. Everybody wants to help, but that is different from going into the actual fighting, you know, and people are very much divided. A few, like David Blackburn, wanted us to declare war the day after the *Lusitania* was destroyed, but most of us feel—

especially the wiser heads—that the President knows more about it than any one else——"

"I suppose he does," admitted Caroline, and she added while she looked at the appointments of the car, "What a beautiful car!"

She sighed gently, for she was thinking of the rotting fence rails and the leaking roof at The Cedars. How far she could make a few thousand dollars go in repairing the house and the out-buildings! If only the leaks could be mended, and the roof reshingled over the wings! If only they could hire a younger man to help poor old Jones, who was growing decrepit!

"This car is Angelica's," said the old lady, "and everything she has is wonderful. As soon as she was married she began to re-decorate Briarlay from garret to cellar. When David first made his money, he went about buying everything he laid eyes on, and she gave whole wagon-loads of furniture to her relatives. There are people who insist that Angelica overdoes things in her way as much as her husband does in his—both were poor when they grew up—but I maintain that her taste is perfect—simply perfect. It is all very well for my daughter Lucy, who has studied interior decoration in New York, to turn up her nose at walls hung with silk in a country house, but to my mind that pink silk in Angelica's parlours is the most beautiful thing she could have, and I reckon I've as good a right to my ideas as Lucy has to hers. After all, as I tell her, it is only a question of taste."

It was a mild, bright afternoon in October, and as the car turned into the River Road, the country spread softly, in undulations of green, gold, and bronze, to the deep blue edge of the horizon. The valley lay in

shadow, while above it shreds of violet mist drifted slowly against the golden ball of the sun. Near at hand the trees were touched with flame, but, as they went on, the brilliant leaves melted gradually into the multi-coloured blend of the distance.

"Mrs. Blackburn must be so beautiful," said Caroline presently. As she approached Briarlay—the house of darkness and mystery that she had seen in her imagination—she felt that the appeal of this unknown woman deepened in vividness and pathos, that it rushed to meet her and enveloped her with the intensity and sweetness of a perfume. It was as if the name Angelica were not a sound, but a thing composed of colour and fragrance—sky-blue like a cloud and as sweet-scented as lilies.

"She was the most beautiful girl who ever came out in Richmond," replied Mrs. Colfax. "The family was so poor that her mother couldn't do anything for her—she didn't even have a coming-out party—but with a girl like that nothing matters. David Blackburn saw her at some reception, and lost his head completely. I won't say his heart because I've never believed that he had one. Of course he was far and away the best chance she was ever likely to have down here, for it wasn't as if they could have sent her to the White Sulphur. They couldn't afford anything, and they were even educating Angelica to be a teacher. What she would have done if David Blackburn hadn't come along when he did, I cannot imagine—though, as I wrote you, I'd have taught school to my dying day before I'd have married him."

"But didn't she care anything for him?" asked Caroline, for it was incredible to her that such a woman should have sold herself.

Mrs. Colfax sniffed at her smelling-salts. "Of course I haven't the right to an opinion," she rejoined, after a pause, "but as I always reply to Charles when he tells me I am talking too much, 'Well, I can't help having eyes.' I remember as well as if it were yesterday the way Angelica looked when she told me of her engagement. 'I have decided to marry David Blackburn, Cousin Lucy,' she said, and then she added, just as if the words were wrung out of her, 'I loathe the thought of teaching!' It doesn't sound a bit like Angelica, but those were her very words. And now, my dear, tell me something about your mother. Does she still keep up her wonderful spirits?"

After this she asked so many questions that Caroline was still answering them when the car turned out of the road and sped up a long, narrow lane, which was thickly carpeted with amber leaves. At the end of the lane, the vista broadened into an ample sweep of lawn surrounding a red brick house with white columns and low wings half hidden in Virginia creeper. It was a beautiful house—so beautiful that Caroline held her breath in surprise. Under the October sky, in the midst of clustering elms, which shed a rain of small bronze leaves down on the bright grass and the dark evergreens, the house appeared to capture and imprison the mellow light of the sunset. It was so still, except for a curving flight of swallows over the roof, and the elm leaves, which fell slowly and steadily in the soft air, that the gleaming windows, the red walls, and the white columns, borrowed, for a moment, the visionary aspect of a place seen in a dream.

"There is a formal garden at the back, full of box-borders and cypresses—only they are really red cedars,"

said Mrs. Colfax. "From the terrace there is a good view of the river, and lower down Angelica has made an old-fashioned garden, with grass walks and rose arbours and mixed flower beds. I never saw such Canterbury bells as she had last summer."

As they entered the circular drive, a touring car passed them slowly on the way out, and a man leaned forward and bowed to Mrs. Colfax. From her casual glance Caroline received an impression of a strong, sunburned face, with heavy brows and dark hair going a little grey on the temples.

"What searching eyes that man has," she observed carelessly, and added immediately, "You know him?"

"Why, that was David Blackburn. I forgot you had never seen him."

"He isn't at all what I expected him to be." While Caroline spoke she felt an inexplicable sense of disappointment. She scarcely knew what she had expected; yet she realized that he was different from some vague image she had had in her mind.

"His face looked so set I'm afraid he has been quarrelling with Angelica," said the old lady. "Poor child, I feel so distressed."

They had reached the house, and as they were about to alight, the door opened, and a girl in a riding habit, with two Airedale terriers at her heels, strolled out on the porch. At sight of Mrs. Colfax, she came quickly forward, and held out her hand. She had a splendid figure, which the riding habit showed to advantage, and though her face was plain, her expression was pleasant and attractive. Without the harsh collar and the severe arrangement of her hair, which was braided

and tied up with a black ribbon, Caroline imagined that she might be handsome.

Mrs. Colfax greeted her as "Miss Blackburn" and explained immediately that she lived at Briarlay with her brother. "She is a great lover of dogs," added the old lady, "and it is a pity that Angelica doesn't like to have them about."

"Oh, they don't mind, they're such jolly beggars," replied the girl in a cheerful, slangy manner, "and besides they get all they want of me. I'm so sorry you didn't come in time for tea. Now I'm just starting for a ride with Alan."

While she was speaking a man on horseback turned from the lane into the drive, and Caroline saw her face change and brighten until it became almost pretty. "There he is now!" she exclaimed, and then she called out impulsively, "Oh, Alan, I've waited for ever!"

He shouted back some words in a gay voice, but Caroline did not catch them, and before he dismounted, Mrs. Colfax led her through the open door into the hall.

"That's Alan Wythe," said the old lady in a whisper, and she resumed a moment later when they stood within the pink silk walls of Angelica's drawing-room, "Mary has been engaged to him for a year, and I never in my life saw a girl so much in love. I suppose it's natural enough—he's charming—but in my day young ladies were more reserved. And now we'll go straight upstairs to Angelica. She is sure to be lying down at this hour."

As they passed through the wide hall, and up the beautiful Colonial staircase, Caroline felt that the luxury of the place bewildered her. Though the house, except in size, was not unlike country homes she had

seen in southside Virginia, there was nothing in her memory, unless she summoned back stray recollections of photographs in Sunday newspapers, that could compare with the decoration of the drawing-room. "It is beautiful, but there is too much of it," she thought, for her eyes, accustomed to bare surfaces and the formal purity of Sheraton and Chippendale, were beginning to discriminate.

"I want you to notice everything when you have time," said Mrs. Colfax. "I tell Angelica that it is a liberal education just to come inside of this house."

"It would take weeks to see it," responded Caroline; and then, as she moved toward a long mirror in the hall upstairs, it seemed to her that her reflection, in her severe blue serge suit, with the little round blue hat Diana had trimmed, looked as grotesquely out of place as if she had been one of the slender Sheraton chairs at The Cedars. "If I appear a lady I suppose it is as much as I can hope for," she thought, "and besides nobody will notice me."

The humour leaped to her eyes, while Mrs. Colfax, watching her with a side-long glance, reflected that Carrie Warwick's daughter had distinction. Her grace was not merely the grace of a slender body with flowing lines; it was the grace of word, of glance, of smile, of gesture, that indefinable and intangible quality which is shed by a lovely soul as fragrance is shed by a flower. "Even if she lives to be as old as I am, she will still keep her poise and her charm of appearance," thought the old lady, "she will never lose it because it isn't a matter of feature—it isn't dependent on outward beauty. Years ago she was prettier than she is to-day, but she wasn't nearly so distinguished."

Aloud she said presently, "Your hair grows in such a nice line on your forehead, my dear, just like your mother's. I remember we always made her brush hers straight back as you do, so she could show her 'widow's peak' in the centre. But yours is much darker, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is almost black. Mother's was the loveliest shade of chestnut. I have a lock of it in an old breast-pin."

A door at the end of the hall opened, and a thin woman, in rusty black alpaca, came to meet them.

"That's the housekeeper—Matty Timberlake, the very salt of the earth," whispered Mrs. Colfax. "She is Angelica's cousin."

When the housekeeper reached them, she stooped and kissed Mrs. Colfax before she spoke to Caroline. She was a long, narrow, neuralgic woman, with near-sighted eyes, thin grey hair which hung in wisps on her forehead, and a look which seemed to complain always that she was poor and dependent and nobody noticed her.

"Angelica is lying down," she said, "but she would like to speak to Miss Meade before I take her to her room."

Caroline's heart gave a bound. "At last I shall see her," she thought, while she followed Mrs. Timberlake down the hall and across the threshold of Angelica's room. The influence that she had felt first in the twilight at The Cedars and again in the drive out from Richmond, welcomed her like a caress.

Her first impression was one of blue and ivory and gold. There was a bed, painted in garlands, with a scalloped canopy of blue silk; and Caroline, who was accustomed to mahogany testers or the little iron beds

in the hospital, was conscious of a thrill of delight as she looked at it. Then her eyes fell on the white bear-skin rug before the fire, and from the rug they passed to the couch on which Mrs. Blackburn was lying. The woman and the room harmonized so perfectly that one might almost have mistaken Angelica for a piece of hand-painted furniture. At first she appeared all blue silk and pale gold hair and small delicate features. Then she sat up and held out her hand, and Caroline saw that she looked not only human, but really tired and frail. There were faint shadows under her eyes, which were like grey velvet, and her hair, parted softly in golden wings over her forehead, showed several barely perceptible creases between her eyebrows. She was so thin that the bones of her face and neck were visible beneath the exquisite texture of her flesh, yet the modelling was as perfect as if her head and shoulders had been chiselled in marble.

"You are Caroline Meade," she said sweetly. "I am so glad you have come."

"I am glad, too. I wanted to come." The vibrant voice, full of warmth and sympathy, trembled with pleasure. For once the reality was fairer than the dream; the woman before her was lovelier than the veiled figure of Caroline's imagination. It was one of those unforgettable moments when the mind pauses, with a sensation of delight and expectancy, on the edge of a new emotion, of an undiscovered country. This was not only something beautiful and rare; it was different from anything that had ever happened to her before; it was a part of the romantic mystery that surrounded the unknown. And it wasn't only that Mrs. Blackburn was so lovely! More than her beauty, the sweet-

ness of her look, the appeal of her delicacy, of her feminine weakness, went straight to the heart. It was as if her nature reached out, with clinging tendrils, seeking support. She was like a fragile white flower that could not live without warmth and sunshine.

"The other nurse leaves in the morning," Mrs. Blackburn was saying in her gentle voice, which carried the merest note of complaint, as if she cherished at heart some secret yet ineradicable grievance against destiny, "So you have come at the right moment to save me from anxiety. I am worried about Letty. You can understand that she is never out of my thoughts."

"Yes, I can understand, and I hope she will like me."

"She will love you from the first minute, for she is really an affectionate child, if one knows how to take her. Oh, Miss Meade, you have taken a load off my shoulders! You look so kind and so competent, and I feel that I can rely on you. I am not strong, you know, and the doctor won't let me be much with Letty. He says the anxiety is too wearing, though, if I had my way, I should never think of myself."

"But you must," said Caroline quietly. She felt that the child's illness and the terrible cause of it were wrecking Mrs. Blackburn's health as well as her happiness.

"Of course, I must try to take care of myself because in the end it will be so much better for Letty." As she answered, Angelica slipped her feet into a pair of embroidered blue silk *mules*, and rising slowly from her lace pillows, stood up on the white rug in front of the fire. Though she was not tall, her extraordinary slenderness gave her the effect of height and the enchanting lines of

one of Botticelli's Graces. "With you in the house I feel that everything will be easier," she added, after a minute in which she gazed down at the new nurse with a thoughtful, appraising look.

"It will be as easy as I can make it. I will do everything that I can." The words were not spoken lightly, for the opportunity of service had brought a glow to Caroline's heart, and she felt that her reply was more than a promise to do her best—that it was a vow of dedication from which only the future could release her. She had given her pledge of loyalty, and Mrs. Blackburn had accepted it. From this instant the bond between them assumed the nature and the obligation of a covenant.

A smile quivered and died on Angelica's lips, while the pathos in her expression drew the other to her as if there were a visible wound to be healed. "You will be a blessing. I can tell that when I look at you," she murmured; and her speech sounded almost empty after the overflowing sympathy of the silence. To Caroline it was a relief when the housekeeper called to her from the doorway, and then led her upstairs to a bedroom in the third storey.

It was a delightful room overlooking the circular drive, and for a minute they stood gazing down on the lawn and the evergreens.

"Everything is so lovely!" exclaimed Caroline presently. One could rest here, she thought, even with hard work and the constant strain, which she foresaw, on her sympathies.

"Yes, it is pretty," answered the housekeeper. Already Mrs. Timberlake had proved that, though she might be the salt of the earth, she was a taciturn and

depressing companion—a stranded wreck left over from too voluble a generation of women.

"And I never saw any one lovelier than Mrs. Blackburn," said Caroline, "she looks like an angel."

"Well, I reckon there is mighty little you can say against Angelica's looks unless your taste runs to a trifle more flesh," responded Mrs. Timberlake drily.

"She ought to be happy," pursued Caroline, with a feeling that was almost one of resentment. "Any one as beautiful as that ought to be happy."

Mrs. Timberlake turned slowly toward her, and Caroline was aware of a spasmodic stiffening of her figure, as if she were nerving herself for an outburst. When the explosion came, however, it was in the nature of an anti-climax.

"I expect you are going to be very useful to her," she said; and in answer to a hurried summons at the door, she made one of her nervous gestures, and went out into the hall.

"It would be perfect," thought Caroline, "if I didn't have to meet Mr. Blackburn"; and she concluded, with a flash of her mother's unquenchable optimism, "Well, perhaps I shan't see him to-night!"

The sun had set, and almost imperceptibly the afterglow had dissolved into the twilight. Outside, the lawn and the evergreens were in shadow; but from the house a misty circle of light fell on the drive, and on a narrow strip of turf, from which each separate blade of grass emerged with exaggerated distinctness as if it were illuminated. Within this circle, with its mysterious penumbra, human life also seemed exaggerated by the luminous haze which divided it from the partial shadow of the evening. The house stood en-

closed in light as in a garden; and beyond it, where the obscurity began, there was the space and silence of the universe. While she stood there, she felt, with a certainty more profound than a mere mental conviction, that this lighted house contained, for her, all the joy and tragedy of human experience; that her life would be interwoven with these other lives as closely as branches of trees in a forest. The appeal of Mrs. Blackburn had stirred her heart and intensified her perceptions. From the bleakness of the last seven years, she had awakened with revived emotions.

"It is just my fancy," she thought, "but I feel as if something wonderful had really happened—as if life were beginning all over again to-night."

The words were still in her mind, when a child's laugh rang out from a window below, and the figure of a man passed from the outlying obscurity across the illuminated grass. Though he moved so hurriedly out of the light, she caught the suggestion of a smile; and she had a singular feeling that he was the same man, and yet not the same man, that she had seen in the motor.

"I do hope I shan't have to meet him to-night," she repeated at the very instant that a knock fell on her door, and an old coloured woman came in to bring a message from Mrs. Blackburn.

She was a benevolent looking, aristocratic negress, with a fine, glossy skin as brown as a chestnut, and traces of Indian blood in her high cheekbones. A white handkerchief was bound over her head like a turban, and her black bombazine dress hung in full, stately folds from her narrow waist line. For a minute, before delivering her message, she peered gravely at Caroline by the dim light of the window.

"Ain't you Miss Carrie Warwick's chile, honey? You ax 'er ef'n she's done forgot de Fitzhugh chillun's mammy? I riz all er de Fitzhugh chillun."

"Then you must be Mammy Riah? Mother used to tell me about you when I was a little girl. You told stories just like Bible ones."

"Dat's me, honey, en I sutney is glad ter see you. De chillun dey wuz al'ays pesterin' me 'bout dose Bible stories jes' exactly de way Letty wuz doin' dis ve'y mawnin'."

"Tell me something about the little girl. Is she really ill?" asked Caroline; and it occurred to her, as she put the question, that it was strange nobody had mentioned the child's malady. Here again the darkness and mystery of the house she had imagined—that house which was so unlike Briarlay—reacted on her mind.

The old negress chuckled softly. "Naw'm, she ain' sick, dat's jes' some er Miss Angy's foolishness. Dar ain' nuttin' in de worl' de matter wid Letty 'cep'n de way dey's brung 'er up. You cyarn' raise a colt ez ef'n hit wuz a rabbit, en dar ain' no use'n tryin'." Then she remembered her message. "Miss Angy sez she sutney would be erbleeged ter you ef'n you 'ould come erlong down ter dinner wid de res' un um. Miss Molly Waver's done 'phone she cyarn' come, en dar ain' nobody else in de house ez kin set in her place."

For an instant Caroline hesitated. "If I go down, I'll have to meet Mr. Blackburn," she said under her breath.

A gleam of humour shot into the old woman's eyes.

"Marse David! Go 'way f'om yer, chile, whut you skeered er Marse David fur?" she rejoined. "He ain' gwine ter hu't you."

CHAPTER IV

Angelica

At a quarter of eight o'clock, when Caroline was waiting to be called, Mrs. Timberlake came in to ask if she might fasten her dress.

"Oh, you're all hooked and ready," she remarked. "I suppose nurses learn to be punctual."

"They have to be, so much depends on it."

"Well, you look sweet. I've brought you a red rose from the table. It will lighten up that black dress a little."

"I don't often go to dinner parties," said Caroline while she pinned on the rose. "Will there be many people?" There was no shyness in her voice or manner; and it seemed to Mrs. Timberlake that the black gown, with its straight, slim skirt, which had not quite gone out of fashion, made her appear taller and more dignified. Her hair, brushed smoothly back from her forehead, gave to her clear profile the look of some delicate etching. There was a faint flush in her cheeks, and her eyes were richer and bluer than they had looked in the afternoon. She was a woman, not a girl, and her charm was the charm not of ignorance, but of intelligence, wisdom, and energy.

"Only twelve," answered the housekeeper, "sometimes we have as many as twenty." There was an expression of pain in her eyes, due to chronic neuralgia, and while she spoke she pressed her fingers to her temples.

"Is Mr. Wythe coming?" asked Caroline.

"He always comes. It is so hard to find unattached men that the same ones get invited over and over. Then there are Mr. and Mrs. Chalmers. They are from New York and the dinner is given to them—and the Ashburtons and Robert Colfax and his wife—who was Daisy Carter—she is very good looking but a little flighty—and Mr. Peyton, old Mrs. Colfax's brother."

"I know—'Brother Charles'—but who are the Ashburtons?"

"Colonel Ashburton is very amusing. He is on Mr. Blackburn's side in politics, and they are great friends. His wife is dull, but she means well, and she is useful on committees because she is a good worker and never knows when she is put upon. Well, it's time for you to go down, I reckon. I just ran up from the pantry to see if I could help you."

A minute later, when Caroline left her room, Mary Blackburn joined her, and the two went downstairs together. Mary was wearing a lovely gown of amber silk, and she looked so handsome that Caroline scarcely recognized her. Her black hair, piled on the crown of her head, gave her, in spite of her modern dash and frankness, a striking resemblance to one of the old portraits at The Cedars. She was in high spirits, for the ride with Alan had left her glowing with happiness.

"We'd better hustle. They are waiting for us," she said. "I was late getting in, so I tossed on the first dress I could find."

Then she ran downstairs, and Caroline, following her more slowly, found herself presently shaking hands with the dreaded David Blackburn. He was so quiet and unassuming that only when he had taken her hand

and had asked her a few conventional questions about her trip, did she realize that she was actually speaking to him. In evening clothes, surrounded by the pink silk walls of Angelica's drawing-room, his face looked firmer and harder than it had appeared in the motor; but even in this extravagant setting, he impressed her as more carefully dressed and groomed than the average Virginian of her acquaintance. She saw now that he was younger than she had at first thought; he couldn't, she surmised, be much over forty. There were deep lines in his forehead; his features had settled into the granite-like immobility that is acquired only through grim and resolute struggle; and his dark, carefully brushed hair showed a silvery gloss on the temples—yet these things, she realized, were the marks of battles, not of years. What struck her most was the quickness with which the touch of arrogance in his expression melted before the engaging frankness of his smile.

"I'm glad you've come. I hope you will get on with Letty," he said; and then, as he turned away, the vision of Angelica, in white chiffon and pearls, floated toward her from a group by the fireplace.

"Colonel Ashburton is an old friend of your mother's, Miss Meade. He took her to her first cotillion, and he is eager to meet her daughter." There followed swift introductions to the Ashburtons, the Chalmers, and the Colfaxes; and not until Caroline was going into the dining-room on the arm of Mrs. Colfax's "Brother Charles," was she able to distinguish between the stranger from New York, who looked lean and wiry and strenuous, and the white-haired old gentleman who had taken her mother to the cotillion. She was not confused; and yet her one vivid impression was of Angelica,

with her pale Madonna head, her soft grey eyes under thick lashes, and her lovely figure in draperies of chiffon that flowed and rippled about her.

Though the house was an inappropriate setting for David Blackburn, it was, for all its newness and ornate accessories, the perfect frame for his wife's beauty. She reminded Caroline of the allegorical figure of Spring in one of the tapestries on the dining-room walls—only she was so much softer, so much more ethereal, as if the floral image had come to life and been endowed with a soul. It was the rare quality of Mrs. Blackburn's beauty that in looking at her one thought first of her spirit—of the sweetness and goodness which informed and animated her features. The appeal she made was the appeal of an innocent and beautiful creature who is unhappy. Against the background of an unfortunate marriage, she moved with the resigned and exalted step of a Christian martyr.

Sitting silently between the flippant "Brother Charles" and the imposing Colonel Ashburton, who was still talking of her mother, Caroline tried to follow the conversation while she studied the faces and the dresses of the women. Mrs. Chalmers, who was large and handsome in a superb gown of green velvet, appeared heavy and indifferent, and Mrs. Ashburton, an overearnest middle-aged woman, with a classic profile and a look of impersonal yet hungry philanthropy, was so detached that she seemed, when she spoke, to be addressing an invisible audience. In spite of her regular features and her flawless complexion, she was as devoid of charm as an organized charity. On her right sat Allan Wythe, a clean-cut, good-looking chap, with romantic eyes and the air of a sportsman. Though

Caroline had heard that he wrote plays, she thought that he needed only a gun and a dog to complete his appearance. "He is the only good-looking man here," she concluded. "Some people might think Mr. Blackburn good-looking, but I suppose I know too much about him." And she remembered that her father had said a man's character always showed in his mouth.

Next to Alan there was Mrs. Robert Colfax—a beautiful Spanish-looking creature, straight as a young poplar, and as full of silvery lights and shadows. She had no sooner sat down than she began to ask Angelica, with an agreeable though flighty animation, if she had seen somebody since he had come back from his wedding trip? For the next quarter of an hour they kept up an excited interchange of gossip, while Mr. Chalmers listened with polite attention, and Caroline tried in vain to discover who the unknown person was, and why his wedding trip should interest anybody so profoundly.

"Well, I never thought he'd get another wife after his last misadventure," rippled Mrs. Colfax, "but they tell me he had only to wink an eyelash. I declare I don't know a more discouraging spectacle than the men that some women will marry."

At the other end of the table, Mrs. Blackburn was talking in a low voice to Mr. Chalmers, and the broken clauses of her conversation were punctuated by the laughter of the irrepressible Daisy, who was never silent. Though Angelica was not brilliant, though she never said anything clever enough for one to remember, she had what her friends called "a sweet way of talking," and a flattering habit, when she was with a man,

of ending every sentence with a question. "I'm sure I don't see how we are to keep out of this war, do you, Mr. Chalmers?" or "I think the simplest way to raise money would be by some tableaux, don't you, Colonel Ashburton?"; and still a little later there floated to Caroline, "I tell Mary she rides too much. Don't you think it is a pity for a woman to spend half her life in the saddle? Of course if she hasn't anything else to do—but in this age, don't you feel, there are so many opportunities of service?"

"Oh, when it comes to that," protested Mrs. Colfax, in the tone of airy banter she affected, "There are many more of us trying to serve than there are opportunities of service. I was telling mother only the other day that I couldn't see a single war charity because the vice-presidents are so thick."

A lull fell on the table, and for the first time Caroline heard Blackburn's voice. Mrs. Chalmers was asking him about the house, and he was responding with a smile that made his face almost young and sanguine. His mouth, when he was not on guard, was sensitive and even emotional, and his eyes lost the sharpness that cut through whatever they looked at.

"Why, yes, I built it before my marriage," he was saying. "Dodson drew the plans. You know Dodson?"

Mrs. Chalmers nodded. "He has done some good things in New York. And this lovely furniture," she was plainly working hard to draw him out. "Where did you find it?"

He met the question lightly. "Oh, I had a lot of stuff here that Angelica got rid of."

From the other end of the table Mrs. Blackburn's

voice floated plaintively, "There isn't a piece of it left," she said. "It made the house look exactly like an Italian hotel."

The remark struck Caroline as so unfortunate that she turned, with a start of surprise, to glance at her hostess. Could it be that Mrs. Blackburn was without tact? Could it be that she did not realize the awkwardness of her interruption? Yet a single glance at Angelica was sufficient to answer these questions. A woman who looked like that couldn't be lacking in social instinct. It must have been a casual slip, nothing more. She was probably tired—hadn't old Mrs. Colfax said that she was delicate?—and she did not perceive the effect of her words. Glancing again in Blackburn's direction, Caroline saw that his features had hardened, and that the hand on the tablecloth was breaking a piece of bread into crumbs.

The change in his manner was so sudden that Caroline understood, even before she saw the twitching of his eyebrows, and the gesture of irritation with which he pushed the bread crumbs away, that, in spite of his reserve and his coldness, he was a bundle of over-sensitive nerves. "He was behaving really well," she thought. "It is a pity that she irritated him." Though she disliked Blackburn, she was just enough to admit that he had started well with Mrs. Chalmers. Of course, no one expected him to appear brilliant in society. A man who had had no education except the little his mother had taught him, and who had devoted his life to making a fortune, was almost as much debarred from social success as a woman who knew only trained nursing. Yet, in spite of these defects, she realized that he appeared to advantage at his own table. There was

something about him—some latent suggestion of force—which distinguished him from every other man in the room. He looked—she couldn't quite define the difference—as if he could do things. The recollection of his stand in politics came to her while she watched him, and turning to Mr. Peyton, who was a trifle more human than Colonel Ashburton, she asked:

"What is this new movement Mr. Blackburn is so much interested in? I've seen a great deal about it in the papers."

There was a bluff, kind way about Charles Peyton, and she liked the natural heartiness of the laugh with which he answered. "You've seen a great deal more than you've read, young lady, I'll warrant. No, it isn't exactly a new movement, because somebody in the North got ahead of him—you may always count on a Yankee butting in just before you—but he is organizing the independent voters in Virginia, if that's what you mean. At least he thinks he is, though even way down here I've a suspicion that those Yankees have been meddling. Between you and me, Miss Meade, it is all humbug—pure humbug. Haven't we got one party already, and doesn't that one have a hard enough time looking after the negroes? Why do we want to go and start up trouble just after we've got things all nicely settled? Why does David want to stir up a hornet's nest among the negroes, I'd like to know?"

On the other side of Caroline, Colonel Ashburton became suddenly audible. "Ask that Rip Van Winkle, Miss Meade, if he was asleep while we made a new constitution and eliminated the vote of the negroes? You can't argue with these stand-patters,

you know, because they never read the signs of the times."

"Well, there isn't a better way of proving it's all humbug than by asking two questions," declared the jovial Charles—a plethoric, unwieldy old man, with a bald head, and a figure that was continually brimming over his waistcoat. "What I want to know, Billy Ashburton, is just this—wasn't your father as good a man as you are, and wasn't the Democratic Party good enough for your father? I put the same to you, Miss Meade, wasn't the Democratic Party good enough for your father?"

"Ah, you're driven to your last trench," observed the Colonel, with genial irony, while Caroline replied slowly: "Yes, it was good enough for father, but I remember he used to be very fond of quoting some lines from Pope about 'principles changing with the times.' I suppose the questions are different from what they were in his day."

"I'd like to see any questions the Democrats aren't able to handle," persisted Charles. "They always have handled them to my satisfaction, and I reckon they always will, in spite of Blackburn and Ashburton."

"I wish Blackburn could talk to you, Miss Meade," said Colonel Ashburton. "He doesn't care much for personalities. He has less small talk than any man I know, but he speaks well if you get him started on ideas. By-the-way, he is the man who won me over. I used to be as strongly prejudiced against any fresh departure in Virginia politics as our friend Charles there, but Blackburn got hold of me, and convinced me, as he has convinced a great many others, against my will. He

proved to me that the old forms are worn out—that they can't do the work any longer. You see, Blackburn is an idealist. He sees straight through the sham to the truth quicker than any man I've ever known——"

"An idealist!" exclaimed Caroline, and mentally she added, "Is it possible for a man to have two characters? To have a public character that gives the lie to his private one?"

"Yes, I think you might call him that, though, like you, I rather shy at the word. But it fits Blackburn, somehow, for he is literally on fire with ideas. I always say that he ought to have lived in the glorious days when the Republic was founded. He belongs to the pure breed of American."

"But I understood from the papers that it was just the other way—that he was—that he was——"

"I know, my child, I know." He smiled indulgently, for she looked very charming with the flush in her cheeks, and after thirty years of happy companionship with an impeccable character, he preferred at dinner a little amiable weakness in a woman. "You have seen in the papers that he is a traitor to the faith of his fathers. You have even heard this asserted by the logical Charles on your right."

She lifted her eyes, and to his disappointment he discovered that earnestness, not embarrassment, had brought the colour to her cheeks. "But I thought that this new movement was directed at the Democratic Party—that it was attempting to undo all that had been accomplished in the last fifty years. It seems the wrong way, but of course there must be a right way toward better things."

For a minute he looked at her in silence; then he said again gently, "I wish Blackburn could talk to you." Since she had come by her ideas honestly, not merely borrowed them from Charles Colfax, it seemed only chivalrous to treat them with the consideration he accorded always to the fair and the frail.

She shook her head. The last thing she wanted was to have Mr. Blackburn talk to her. "I thought all old-fashioned Virginians opposed this movement," she added after a pause. "Not that I am very old-fashioned. You remember my father, and so you will know that his daughter is not afraid of opinions."

"Yes, I remember him, and I understand that his child could not be afraid either of opinions or armies."

She smiled up at him, and he saw that her eyes, which had been a little sad, were charged with light. While he watched her he wondered if her quietness were merely a professional habit of reserve which she wore like a uniform. Was the warmth and fervour which he read now in her face a glimpse of the soul which life had hidden beneath the dignity of her manner?

"But Blackburn isn't an agitator," he resumed after a moment. "He has got hold of the right idea—the new application of eternal principles. If we could send him to Washington he would do good work."

"To Washington?" She looked at him inquiringly. "You mean to the Senate? Not in the place of Colonel Acton?"

"Ah, that touches you! You wouldn't like to see the 'Odysseus of Democracy' dispossessed?"

Laughter sparkled in her eyes, and he realized that she was more girlish than he had thought her a minute ago. After all, she had humour, and it was a favourite

saying of his that ideas without humour were as bad as bread without yeast.

"Only for another Ajax," she retorted merrily. "I prefer the strong to the wise. But does Mr. Blackburn want the senatorship?"

"Perhaps not, but he might be made to take it. There is a rising tide in Virginia."

"Is it strong enough to overturn the old prejudices?"

"Not yet—not yet, but it is strengthening every hour." His tone had lost its gallantry and grown serious. "The war in Europe has taught us a lesson. We aren't satisfied any longer, the best thought isn't satisfied, with the old clutter and muddle of ideas and sentiments. We begin to see that what we need in politics is not commemorative gestures, but constructive patriotism."

As he finished, Caroline became aware again that Blackburn was speaking, and that for the first time Mrs. Chalmers looked animated and interested.

"Why, that has occurred to me," he was saying with an earnestness that swept away his reserve. "But, you see, it is impossible to do anything in the South with the Republican Party. The memories are too black. We must think in new terms."

"And you believe that the South is ready for another party? Has the hour struck?"

"Can't you hear it?" He looked up as he spoke. "The war abroad has liberated us from the old sectional bondage. It has brought the world nearer, and the time is ripe for the national spirit. The demand now is for men. We need men who will construct ideas, not copy them. We need men strong enough to break up the solid South and the solid North, and pour them to-

gether into the common life of the nation. We want a patriotism that will overflow party lines, and put the good of the country before the good of a section. The old phrases, the old gestures, are childish to-day because we have outgrown them——" He stopped abruptly, his face so enkindled that Caroline would not have known it, and an instant later the voice of Mrs. Blackburn was heard saying sweetly but firmly, "David, I am afraid that Mrs. Chalmers is not used to your melodramatic way of talking."

In the hush that followed it seemed as if a harsh light had fallen over Blackburn's features. A moment before Caroline had seen him inspired and exalted by feeling—the vehicle of the ideas that possessed him—and now, in the sharp flash of Angelica's irony, he appeared insincere and theatrical—the claptrap politician in motley.

"It is a pity she spoke just when she did," thought Caroline, "but I suppose she sees through him so clearly that she can't help herself. She doesn't want him to mislead the rest of us."

Blackburn's guard was up again, and though he made no reply, his brow paled slowly and his hand—the nervous, restless hand of the emotional type—played with the bread crumbs.

"Yes, it is a pity," repeated Caroline to herself. "It makes things very uncomfortable." It was evident to her that Mrs. Blackburn watched her husband every instant—that she was waiting all the time to rectify his mistakes, to put him in the right again. Then, swiftly as an arrow, there flashed through Caroline's mind, "Only poor, lovely creature, she achieves exactly the opposite result. She is so nervous she can't see

that she puts him always in the wrong. She makes matters worse instead of better every time."

From this moment the dinner dragged on heavily to its awkward end. Blackburn had withdrawn into his shell; Mrs. Chalmers looked depressed and bored; while the giddy voice of Mrs. Colfax sounded as empty as the twitter of a sparrow. It was as if a blight had fallen over them, and in this blight Angelica made charming, futile attempts to keep up the conversation. She had tried so hard, her eyes, very gentle and pensive, seemed to say, and all her efforts were wasted.

Suddenly, in the dull silence, Mrs. Colfax began asking, in her flightiest manner, about Angelica's family. For at least five minutes she had vacillated in her own mind between the weather and Roane Fitzhugh, who, for obvious reasons, was not a promising topic; and now at last, since the weather was too perfect for comment, she recklessly decided to introduce the unsavoury Roane.

"We haven't seen your brother recently, Angelica. What do you hear from him?"

For an instant Mrs. Blackburn's eyes rested with mute reproach on her husband. Then she said clearly and slowly, "He has been away all summer, but we hope he is coming next week. David," she added suddenly in a louder tone, "I was just telling Daisy how glad we are that Roane is going to spend the autumn at Briarlay."

It was at that instant, just as Mrs. Blackburn, smiling amiably on her husband, was about to rise from the table, that the astounding, the incredible thing happened, for Blackburn looked up quickly, and replied in a harsh, emphatic manner, "He is not coming to Briarlay. You know that we cannot have him here."

Then before a word was uttered, before Mrs. Colfax had time to twitter cheerfully above the awkwardness, Mrs. Blackburn rose from her chair, and the women trailed slowly after her out of the dining-room. As Caroline went, she felt that her heart was bursting with sympathy for Angelica and indignation against her husband. "How in the world shall I ever speak to him after this?" she thought. "How shall I ever stay under the same roof with him?" And glancing pityingly to where Mrs. Blackburn's flower-like head drooped against the rosy shade of a lamp, she realized that Angelica never looked so lovely as she did when she was hurt.

CHAPTER V

The First Night

When the last guest had gone, Caroline went upstairs to her room, and sitting down before the little ivory and gold desk, began a letter to her mother. For years, ever since her first night in the hospital, she had poured out her heart after the day's work and the day's self-control and restraint were over. It was a relief to be free sometimes, to break through the discipline of her profession, to live and love for oneself, not for others.

The house was very still—only from the darkness outside, where the wind had risen, a few yellow leaves fluttered in through the window.

I am here, at last, dearest mother, and I have been longing to tell you about it. First of all, I had a good trip, my train was exactly on time, and Mrs. Colfax met me in the most beautiful car I ever saw, and brought me out to Briarlay. She was very nice and kind, but she looks ever so much older than you do, and I cannot help feeling that, in spite of the loss of so many children and father's dreadful disappointments, your life has been happier than hers. As I get older, and see more of the world—and heaven knows I have seen anything but the best of it these last seven or eight years—I understand better and better that happiness is something you have to find deep down in yourself, not in other people or outside things. It shines through sometimes just as yours does and lights up the world

around and the dark places, but it never, *never* comes from them—of this I am very sure.

I wish I could describe this house to you, but I cannot—I simply cannot, the words will not come to me. It is big and beautiful, but I think it is too full of wonderful things—there are rooms that make me feel as if I were in a museum because of the tapestries and crowded rugs and French furniture. I like English mahogany so much better, but that may be just because I am used to it. I suppose it is natural that Mrs. Blackburn should prefer surroundings that are opulent and florid, since they make her look like a lovely flower in a greenhouse. She is even more beautiful than I thought she would be, and she does not seem the least bit snobbish or spoiled or arrogant. I have always said, you remember, that nursing has taught me not to rely on mere impressions whether they are first or last ones—but I have never in my life met any one who attracted me so strongly in the beginning. It is years since I have felt my sympathy so completely drawn out by a stranger. I feel that I would do anything in the world that I could for her; and though I cannot write frankly about what I have observed here, I believe that she needs help and understanding as much as any one I ever saw. The situation seems worse even than we were led to expect. Of course I have seen only the surface so far, but my heart has been wrung for her ever since I have been in the house, and this evening there was a very painful scene at the dinner table. I shall not write any more about it, though I imagine it will be spread all over Richmond by young Mrs. Colfax.

About Mr. Blackburn I have not quite made up my mind. I do not doubt that everything Mrs. Colfax wrote us is true, and I know if I stay on here that I shall make no attempt to conceal from him how much I dislike him. That will be no secret. I simply could not pretend even to him that I was not heart and soul on the side of his wife. It is so perfectly dreadful when one has to take sides with a husband or wife, isn't it?

When I think how wonderful a marriage like yours and father's can be, it makes me feel sorry and ashamed for human nature as I see it here. But you cannot become a nurse and keep many illusions about love. The thing that remains after years of such work is no illusion at all—but the clear knowledge of the reality. A nurse sees the best and the worst of humanity—and the very best of it is the love that some people keep to the end.

As for this marriage, there is not a person in Richmond, nor a servant in the house, who does not know that it is an unhappy one. Mrs. Blackburn cannot be at fault—one has only to look at her to realize that she is too gentle and sweet to hurt any one—and yet I discovered to-night that she does not know how to treat him, that she says the wrong thing so often without meaning to, and that unconsciously she irritates him whenever she speaks. It is impossible to blame her, for she must have suffered a great many things that no one knows of, and I suppose her nerves are not always under control. But nothing could be more unfortunate than her manner to him at times.

Strange to say (I do not understand why) some people appear to admire him tremendously. I went down to dinner to-night because one of the guests did not come, and Colonel Ashburton—he said he used to know you—talked in the most extravagant fashion about Mr. Blackburn's abilities. The air here is heavy with politics because of the elections, and I tried to listen as closely as I could. I thought how intensely interested father would have been in the discussion. As far as I can understand Mr. Blackburn's way of thinking is not unlike father's, and but for his behaviour to his wife, this would give me a sympathetic feeling for him. I forgot to tell you that he looked very well to-night—not in the least rough or common. His face is not ugly, only he wears his hair brushed straight back, and this makes his features look sterner than they really are. His eyes are the keenest I ever saw—grey, I think, and yet, funny as it sounds, there are times when they are

almost pathetic—and his smile is very nice and reminds me in a way of father's. This may have been why I thought of father all the time I was at dinner—this and the political talk which went on as long as we were at the table.

Well, I started to tell you about the elections, and I know you are thinking I shall never go on. It seems that Mr. Blackburn intends to vote for Hughes—though I heard him tell Mr. Chalmers that if he lived in the North he should probably vote with the Democrats. Voting for a man, he feels, is not nearly so important as voting against a section—at least this is what I gathered. There was a great deal said about the war, but nobody, except Mrs. Colfax's brother Charles, who does not count, seemed to think there was the faintest chance of our being in it. Mr. Chalmers told me afterwards that if Wilson should be re-elected, it would be mainly because of the slogan "he kept us out of war." As far as I could discover Mr. Chalmers stands firmly by the President, but I heard Mr. Blackburn tell Colonel Ashburton that what he hoped for now was conduct so flagrant, on Germany's part, that the public conscience would demand a more vigorous policy. By the way, Mr. Chalmers said that the feeling was so strong in New York that he expected the State to go to the Republicans because there was a general impression that to vote with them meant to vote for war. Of course, he added, this was mere German propaganda—but that was only another way of saying he did not agree with it. Opinions change every hour, and just as soon as a new one begins to be popular, people forget all that they believed just as ardently a few weeks before. Don't you remember how complacent we were about our splendid isolation and our pluperfect pacifism and our being "too proud to fight" such a very short while ago? Well, nobody remembers now the way we crowed over Europe and patted one another on the back, and congratulated ourselves because we could stand aside and wait until history showed who was right. That is over and gone

now, and "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier" has joined the dust of all the other rag-time. If the slow coach of history ever does come up with us, it may find us in the thick of the fight after all, and not waiting by the roadside. Mr. Chalmers believes that if the President is re-elected, and can get the country behind him, the Government will declare that a state of war exists—but Mr. Blackburn, on the other hand, is convinced that both Wilson and Hughes are pledged to fulfil their promises of "peace and prosperity." He insists that there was more war spirit over the whole country the week after the *Lusitania* was sunk, than there has ever been since, and that we were as ready to fight then as we shall be after the elections. It is like being in the midst of electric currents to sit still and listen to these men argue. Can you imagine anything more unlike father's day when all Virginians, except those whom nobody knew, thought exactly alike? Now, though the vote is solid still, and the great majority accepts the policies of the Democrats as uncritically as it accepts Scripture, opinions about secondary issues vary as much as they do anywhere else. There are some who regard the President as greater than George Washington—and others who say that the moment is great, not the man. Mr. Colfax believes that he is a generation ahead of his country, and Colonel Ashburton believes just as strongly that he is a generation behind it—that it is a case where a wave of destiny is sweeping a man on to greatness. I suppose here again we shall have to wait until history shows who is right.

I have not seen the little girl yet—her name is Letty. They have to be careful not to excite her in the evening, and the other nurse is still with her.

Now I must go to bed.

Your devoted child,
CAROLINE.

She had finished her letter and glanced at her watch on the bureau—it was one o'clock—when a cry or

moan reached her from the darkness and silence of the house, and a few minutes afterwards there came the sound of running footsteps on the stairs, and a hasty knock fell on her door.

"Miss Meade, will you please come as quickly as you can?"

Opening the door, she met the frightened face of a maid.

"What has happened? Is Mrs. Blackburn ill?"

"I don't know. She hasn't undressed and she is too ill to speak. I left her on the couch, and ran upstairs to call you."

They were already in the hall, and while they hurried to the staircase, Caroline asked a few questions in a whisper.

"Is there any medicine that she is accustomed to take?"

"I give her ammonia sometimes, but to-night it didn't do any good."

"Does she faint often?"

"I'm not sure. She has these attacks, but only after —after——"

The woman paused in confusion, and before she could recover herself, Caroline had opened the door and walked swiftly to the prostrate figure, in white chiffon, on the couch in front of the fire. Bending over she felt Angelica's pulse and lowered her head, with its loosened amber hair, on the pillows.

"Your pulse is good. Do you feel better now?" she asked tenderly, for, in spite of the quiet competence of her professional attitude, her heart was aching with pity.

"I was sure I could count on your sympathy." As

she answered, Mrs. Blackburn stretched out her hands until they rested on Caroline's arm. "Has Mary gone out of the room?"

"Your maid? Yes, she has just gone. What can I do for you?"

Even in the midst of the emotional crisis, Angelica's manner had not lost a trace of its charming self-possession, its rather colourless sweetness. Her grey eyes, drenched in tears which left no redness on the firm white lids, were as devoid of passion as the eyes of a child.

"I cannot tell you—I cannot tell any one," she said after a moment, not in answer to the other's question, but with a plaintive murmur. Then she began to cry very gently, while she clung to Caroline with her lovely hands which were as soft and fragrant as flowers.

"I think I know without your telling me," responded Caroline soothingly. "Let me help you." All her years of nursing had not enabled her to watch suffering, especially the suffering of helpless things, without a pang of longing to comfort. She was on her knees now by the couch, her smooth dark head bending over Angelica's disarranged fair one, her grave, compassionate face gazing down on the other's delicate features, which were softened, not disfigured, by tears.

"The worst is about Roane—my brother," began Angelica slowly. "He came here to-night, but they—" she lingered over the word, "sent him away before I could talk to him. He is downstairs now on the terrace because he is not allowed to come into the house—my brother. I must get this cheque to him, but I do not like to ask one of the servants——"

"You wish me to take it to him?" Caroline released

herself from the clinging hands, and rose quickly to her feet. Here at last was a definite call to action.

"Oh, Miss Meade, if you would!" Already Angelica's eyes were dry.

"I will go at once. Is the cheque written?".

"I carried it down with me, but I could not get a chance to give it to Roane. Poor boy," she added in a low rather than a soft tone, "Poor boy, after all, he is more sinned against than sinning!"

Drawing the cheque from under the lace pillows, she gave it into Caroline's hand with a gesture of relief. "Go through the dining-room to the terrace, and you will find him outside by the windows. Tell him that I will see him as soon as I can, and ask him please not to trouble me again."

She had rung for her maid while she was speaking, and when the woman appeared, she rose and waited, with a yawn, for her dress to be unfastened. Then suddenly, as if she had forgotten something, she gave Caroline a smile full of beauty and pathos. "Thank you a thousand times, dear Miss Meade," she exclaimed gratefully.

It was dark downstairs, except for a nebulous glow from the hall above and a thin reddish line that ran beneath the closed door of the library. Not until she reached the dining-room did Caroline dare turn on the electric light, and as soon as she did so, the terrace and the garden appeared by contrast to be plunged in blackness. When she opened one of the long French windows, and stepped out on the brick terrace, her eyes became gradually accustomed to the starlight, and she discerned presently the shrouded outlines of the juniper trees and a marble fountain which emerged like a ghost

from the quivering spray of water. As she went quickly down the steps to the lower terrace, she felt as much alone in her surroundings as if the house and Mrs. Blackburn had receded into a dream. Overhead there was the silvery glitter of stars, and before her she divined the simplicity and peace of an autumn garden, where the wind scattered the faint scent of flowers that were already beginning to drop and decay.

When she approached the fountain, the figure of a man detached itself from the vague shape of an evergreen, and came toward her.

"Well, I've waited awhile, haven't I?" he began airily, and the next instant exclaimed with scarcely a change of tone, "Who are you? Did Anna Jeannette send you?"

"I am Letty's new nurse—Miss Meade."

"What! A spirit yet a woman too!" His voice was full of charm.

"Mrs. Blackburn sent me with this." As she held out the cheque, he took it with a gesture that was almost hungry. "She asked me to say that she would see you very soon, and to beg you not to trouble her again."

"Does she imagine that I do it for pleasure!" He placed the cheque in his pocket book. "She cannot suppose that I came here to-night for the sake of a row."

Though he was unusually tall, he carried his height with the ease of an invincible dignity and self-possession; and she had already discerned that his sister's pathos had no part in the tempestuous ardour and gaiety of his nature.

"She didn't tell me," answered Caroline coldly. "There is nothing else, is there?" Her features were

like marble beneath the silken dusk of her hair which was faintly outlined against the cloudier darkness.

"There is a great deal—since you ask me."

"Nothing, I mean, that I may say to your sister?"

"You may say to her that I thank her for her message —and her messenger."

He was about to add something more, when Caroline turned away from him and moved, without haste, as if she were unaware that he followed her, up the shallow steps of the terrace. When she reached the window, she passed swiftly, like a dissolving shadow, from the darkness into the light of the room. Nothing had been said that she found herself able to resent, and yet, in some indefinable way, Roane's manner had offended her. "For a trained nurse you are entirely too particular," she said to herself, smiling, as she put out the light and went through the wide doorway into the hall. "You have still a good deal of haughtiness to overcome, Miss Meade, if you expect every man to treat you as if you wore side curls and a crinoline."

The hall, when she entered it, was very dim, but as she approached the door of the library, it opened, and Blackburn stood waiting for her on the threshold. Behind him the room was illuminated, and she saw the rich sheen of leather bindings and the glow of firelight on the old Persian rug by the hearth.

"You have been out, Miss Meade?"

"Yes, I have been out." As she threw back her head, the light was full on her face while his was in shadow.

"Do you need anything?"

"Nothing, thank you."

For an instant their eyes met, and in that single glance, charged with an implacable accusation, she

made Angelica's cause her own. Grave, remote, dispassionate, her condemnation was as impersonal as a judgment of the invisible Powers.

"That is all, then, good-night," he said.

"Good-night."

While he watched her, she turned as disdainfully as she had turned from Roane, and ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER VI

Letty

In the breakfast room next morning, Caroline found the little girl in charge of Miss Miller, the nurse who was leaving that day. Letty was a fragile, undeveloped child of seven years, with the dark hair and eyes of her father, and the old, rather elfish look of children who have been ill from the cradle. Her soft, fine hair hung straight to her shoulders, and framed her serious little face, which was charming in spite of its unhealthy pallor. Caroline had questioned Miss Miller about the child's malady, and she had been reassured by the other nurse's optimistic view of the case.

"We think she may outgrow the trouble, that's why we are so careful about all the rules she lives by. The doctor watches her closely, and she isn't a difficult child to manage. If you once gain her confidence you can do anything with her, but first of all you must make her believe in you."

"Was she always so delicate?"

"I believe she was born this way. She is stunted physically, though she is so precocious mentally. She talks exactly like an old person sometimes. The things she says would make you laugh if it wasn't so pathetic to know that a child thinks them."

Yes, it was pathetic, Caroline felt, while she watched Letty cross the room to her father, who was standing

before one of the French windows. As she lifted her face gravely. Blackburn bent over and kissed her.

"I'm taking a new kind of medicine, father."

He smiled down on her. "Then perhaps you will eat a new kind of breakfast."

"And I've got a new nurse," added Letty before she turned away and came over to Caroline. "I'm so glad you wear a uniform," she said in her composed manner. "I think uniforms are much nicer than dresses like Aunt Matty's."

Mrs. Timberlake looked up from the coffee urn with a smile that was like a facial contortion. "Anything might be better than my dresses, Letty."

"But you ought to get something pretty," said the child quickly, for her thoughts came in flashes. "If you wore a uniform you might look happy, too. Are all nurses happy, Miss Miller?"

"We try to be, dear," answered Miss Miller, a stout, placid person, while she settled the little girl in her chair. "It makes things so much easier."

Blackburn, who had been looking out on the terrace and the formal garden, turned and bowed stiffly as he came to the table. It was evident that he was not in a talkative mood, and as Caroline returned his greeting with the briefest acknowledgment, she congratulated herself that she did not have to make conversation for him. Mary had not come in from her ride, and since Mrs. Timberlake used language only under the direct pressure of necessity, the sound of Letty's unembarrassed childish treble rippled placidly over the constrained silence of her elders.

"Can you see the garden?" asked the child presently.

"I don't mean the box garden, I mean the real garden where the flowers are?"

Caroline was helping herself to oatmeal, and raising her eyes from the dish, she glanced through the window which gave on the brick terrace. Beyond the marble fountain and a dark cluster of junipers there was an arch of box, which framed the lower garden and a narrow view of the river.

"That's where my garden is, down there," Letty was saying. "I made it all by myself—didn't I, Miss Miller? —and my verbenas did better than mother's last summer. Would you like to have a garden, father?" she inquired suddenly, turning to Blackburn, who was looking over the morning paper while he waited for his coffee. "It wouldn't be a bit more trouble for me to take care of two than one. I'll make yours just like mine if you want me to."

Blackburn put down his paper. "Well, I believe I should like one," he replied gravely, "if you are sure you have time for it. But aren't there a great many more important things you ought to do?"

"Oh, it doesn't take so much time," returned the child eagerly, "I work all I can, but the doctor won't let me do much. I'll make yours close to mine, so there won't be far to go with the water. I have to carry it in a very little watering-pot because they won't let me lift a big one."

A smile quivered for an instant on her father's lips, and Caroline saw his face change and soften as it had done the evening before. It was queer, she thought, that he should have such a sensitive mouth. She had imagined that a man of that character would have coarse lips and a brutal expression.

"Now, it's odd, but I've always had a fancy for a garden of that sort," he responded, "if you think you can manage two of them without over-taxing yourself. I don't want to put you to additional trouble, you know. After all, that's just what I hire Peter for, isn't it?"

While the child was assuring him that Peter had neither the time nor the talent for miniature gardening, Miss Miller remarked pleasantly, as if she were visited by a brilliant idea, "You ought to make one for your mother also, Letty."

"Oh, mother doesn't want one," returned the child: "The big ones are hers, aren't they, father?" Then, as Blackburn had unfolded his paper again, she added to Caroline, with one of the mature utterances Miss Miller had called pathetic, "When you have big things you don't care for little things, do you?"

As they were finishing breakfast, Mary Blackburn dashed in from the terrace, with the Airedale terriers at her heels.

"I was afraid you'd have gone before I got back, David," she said, tossing her riding-crop and gloves on a chair, and coming over to the table. "Patrick, put the dogs out, and tell Peter to give them their breakfast." Then turning back to her brother, she resumed carelessly, "That man stopped me again—that foreman you discharged from the works."

Blackburn's brow darkened. "Ridley? I told him not to come on the place. Is he hanging about?"

"I met him in the lane. He asked me to bring a message to you. It seems he wants awfully to be reinstated. He is out of work; and he doesn't want to go North for a job."

"It's a pity he didn't think of that sooner. He has made more trouble in the plant than any ten men I've ever had. It isn't his fault that there's not a strike on now."

"I know," said Mary, "but I couldn't refuse to hear him. There's Alan now," she added. "Ask him about it."

She looked up, her face flushing with pride and happiness, as Alan Wythe opened the window. There was something free and noble in her candour. All the little coquetries and vanities of women appeared to shrivel in the white blaze of her sincerity.

"So you've been held up by Ridley," remarked Blackburn, as the young man seated himself between Mary and Mrs. Timberlake. "Did he tell you just what political capital he expects to make out of my discharging him? It isn't the first time he has tried blackmail."

Alan was replying to Mrs. Timberlake's question about his coffee—she never remembered, Caroline discovered later, just how much sugar one liked—and there was a pause before he turned to Blackburn and answered: "I haven't a doubt that he means to make trouble sooner or later—he has some pull, hasn't he?—but at the moment he is more interested in getting his job back. He talked a lot about his family—tried to make Mary ask you to take him on again——"

Blackburn laughed, not unpleasantly, but with a curious bluntness and finality, as if he were closing a door on some mental passage. "Well, you may tell him," he rejoined, "that I wouldn't take him back if all the women in creation asked me."

Alan received this with his usual ease and flippancy.

"The fellow appears to have got the wrong impression. He told me that Mrs. Blackburn was taking an interest in his case, and had promised to speak to you."

"He told you that?" said Blackburn, and stopped abruptly.

For a minute Alan looked almost disconcerted. In his riding clothes he was handsomer and more sportsmanlike than he had been the evening before, and Caroline told herself that she could understand why Mary Blackburn had fallen so deeply in love with him. What she couldn't understand—what puzzled her every instant—was the obvious fact that Alan had fallen quite as deeply in love with Mary. Of course the girl was fine and sensible and high-spirited—any one could see that—but she appeared just the opposite of everything that Alan would have sought in a woman. She was neither pretty nor feminine; and Alan's type was the one of all others to which the pretty and feminine would make its appeal. "He must love her for her soul," thought Caroline. "He must see how splendid she is at heart, and this has won him."

In a few minutes Blackburn left the table, while Letty caught Caroline's hand and drew her through the window out on the terrace. The landscape, beyond the three gardens, was golden with October sunlight, and over the box maze and the variegated mist of late blooming flowers, they could see the river and the wooded slopes that folded softly into the sparkling edge of the horizon. It was one of those autumn days when the only movement of the world seems to be the slow fall of the leaves, and the quivering of gauzy-winged insects above the flower-beds. Perfect as the weather was, there was a touch of melancholy in its brightness that

made Caroline homesick for The Cedars. "It is hard to be where nobody cares for you," she thought. "Where nothing you feel or think matters to anybody." Then her stronger nature reasserted itself, and she brushed the light cloud away. "After all, life is mine as much as theirs. The battle is mine, and I will fight it. It is just as important that I should be a good nurse as it is that Mrs. Blackburn should be beautiful and charming and live in a house that is like fairyland."

Letty called to her, and running down the brick steps from the terrace, the two began a gentle game of hide-and-seek in the garden. The delighted laughter of the child rang out presently from the rose-arbours and the winding paths; and while Caroline passed in and out of the junipers and the young yew-trees, she forgot the loneliness she had felt on the terrace. "I'll not worry about it any more," she thought, pursuing Letty beyond the marble fountain, where a laughing Cupid shot a broken arrow toward the sun. "Mother used to say that all the worry in the world would never keep a weasel out of the hen-house." Then, as she twisted and doubled about a tall cluster of junipers, she ran directly across the shadow of Blackburn.

As her feet came to a halt the smile died on her lips, and the reserve she had worn since she reached Briarlay fell like a veil over her gaiety. While she put up her hand to straighten her cap, all the dislike she felt for him showed in her look. Only the light in her eyes, and the blown strands of hair under her cap, belied her dignity and her silence.

"Miss Meade, I wanted to tell you that the doctor will come about noon. I have asked him to give you directions."

"Very well." Against the dark junipers, in her white uniform, she looked like a statue except for her parted lips and accusing eyes.

"Letty seems bright to-day, but you must not let her tire herself."

"I am very careful. We play as gently as possible."

"Will you take her to town? I'll send the car back for you."

For an instant she hesitated. "Mrs. Blackburn has not told me what she wishes."

He nodded. "Letty uses my car in the afternoon. It will be here at three o'clock."

In the sunlight, with his hat off, he looked tanned and ruddy, and she saw that there was the power in his face which belongs to expression—to thought and purpose—rather than to feature. His dark hair, combed straight back from his forehead, made his head appear distinctive and massive, like the relief of a warrior on some ancient coin, and his eyes, beneath slightly beetling brows, were the colour of the sea in a storm. Though his height was not over six feet, he seemed to her, while he stood there beside the marble fountain, the largest and strongest man she had ever seen. "I know he isn't big, and yet he appears so," she thought: "I suppose it is because he is so muscular." And immediately she added to herself, "I can understand everything about him except his mouth—but his mouth doesn't belong in his face. It is the mouth of a poet. I wonder he doesn't wear a moustache just to hide the way it changes."

"I shall be ready at three o'clock," she said. "Mrs. Colfax asked me to bring Letty to play with her children."

"She will enjoy that," he answered, "if they are not rough." Then, as he moved away, he observed indifferently, "It is wonderful weather."

As he went back to the house Letty clung to him, and lifting her in his arms, he carried her to the terrace and round the corner where the car waited. For the time at least the play was spoiled, and Caroline, still wearing her professional manner, stood watching for Letty to come back to her. "I could never like him if I saw him every day for years," she was thinking, when one of the French windows of the dining-room opened, and Mary Blackburn came down the steps into the garden.

"I am so glad to find you alone," she said frankly, "I want to speak to you—and your white dress looks so nice against those evergreens."

"It's a pity I have to change it then, but I am going to take Letty to town after luncheon. The doctor wants her to be with other children."

"I know. She is an odd little thing, isn't she? I sometimes think that she is older and wiser than any one in the house." Her tone changed abruptly. "I want to explain to you about last night, Miss Meade. David seemed so dreadfully rude, didn't he?"

Caroline gazed back at her in silence while a flush stained her cheeks. After all, what could she answer? She couldn't and wouldn't deny that Mr. Blackburn had been inexcusably rude to his wife at his own table.

"It is so hard to explain when one doesn't know everything," pursued Mary, with her unfaltering candour. "If you had ever seen Roane Fitzhugh, you would understand better than I can make you that David is right. It is quite impossible to have Roane

in the house. He drinks, and when he was here last summer, he was hardly ever sober. He was rude to everyone. He insulted me."

"So that was why——" began Caroline impulsively, and checked herself.

"Yes, that was why. David told him that he must never come back again."

"And Mrs. Blackburn did not understand."

Mary did not reply, and glancing at her after a moment, Caroline saw that she was gazing thoughtfully at a red and gold leaf, which turned slowly in the air as it detached itself from the stem of a maple.

"If you want to get the best view of the river you ought to go down to the end of the lower garden," she said carelessly before she went back into the house.

In the afternoon, when Caroline took Letty to Mrs. Colfax's, a flickering light was shed on the cause of Mary's reticence.

"Oh, Miss Meade, wasn't it perfectly awful last evening?" began the young woman as soon as the children were safely out of hearing in the yard. "I feel so sorry for Angelica!"

Even in a Southern woman her impulsiveness appeared excessive, and when Caroline came to know her better, she discovered that Daisy Colfax was usually described by her friends as "kind-hearted, but painfully indiscreet."

"It was my first dinner party at Briarlay. As far as I know they may all end that way," responded Caroline lightly.

"Of course I know that you feel you oughtn't to talk," replied Mrs. Colfax persuasively, "but you needn't be afraid of saying just what you think to me.

I know that I have the reputation of letting out everything that comes into my mind—and I do love to gossip—but I shouldn't dream of repeating anything that is told me in confidence." Her wonderful dusky eyes, as vague and innocent as a child's, swept Caroline's face before they wandered, with their look of indirection and uncertainty, to her mother-in-law, who was knitting by the window. Before her marriage Daisy had been the acknowledged beauty of three seasons, and now, the mother of two children and as lovely as ever, she managed to reconcile successfully a talent for housekeeping with a taste for diversion. She was never still except when she listened to gossip, and before Caroline had been six weeks in Richmond, she had learned that the name of Mrs. Robert Colfax would head the list of every dance, ball, and charity of the winter.

"If you ask me what I think," observed the old lady tartly, with a watchful eye on the children, who were playing ring-around-the-rosy in the yard. "It is that David Blackburn ought to have been spanked and put to bed."

"Well, of course, Angelica had been teasing him about his political views," returned her daughter-in-law. "You know how she hates it all, but she didn't mean actually to irritate him—merely to keep him from appearing so badly. It is as plain as the nose on your face that she doesn't know how to manage him."

They were sitting in the library, and every now and then the younger woman would take up the receiver of the telephone, and have a giddy little chat about the marketing or a motor trip she was planning. "But all I've got to say," she added, turning from one of these

breathless colloquies, "is that if you have to manage a man, you'd better try to get rid of him."

"Well, I'd like to see anybody but a bear-tamer manage David Blackburn," retorted the old lady. "With Angelica's sensitive nature she ought never to have married a man who has to be tamed. She never dares take her eyes off him, poor thing, for fear he'll make some sort of break."

"I wonder," began Caroline, and hesitated an instant. "I wonder if it wouldn't be better just to let him make his breaks and not notice them? Of course, I know how trying it must be for her—she is so lovely and gentle that it wrings your heart to see him rude to her—but it makes every little thing appear big when you call everybody's attention to it. I don't know much about dinner parties," she concluded with a desire to be perfectly fair even to a man she despised, "but I couldn't see that he was doing anything wrong last night. He was getting on very well with Mrs. Chalmers, who was interested in politics——" She broke off and asked abruptly, "Is Mrs. Blackburn's brother really so dreadful?"

"I've often wondered," said the younger Mrs. Colfax, "if Roane Fitzhugh is as bad as people say he is?"

"Well, he has always been very polite to me," commented the old lady. "Though Brother Charles says that you cannot judge a man's morals by his manners. Was Alan Wythe there last night?"

"Yes, I sat by him," answered Daisy. "I wish that old uncle of his in Chicago would let him marry Mary."

This innocent remark aroused Caroline's scorn. "To think of a man's having to ask his uncle whom he shall marry!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"You wouldn't say that, my dear," replied old Mrs. Colfax, "if you knew Alan. He is a charming fellow, but the sort of talented ne'er-do-well who can do anything but make a living. He has an uncle in Chicago who is said to be worth millions—one of the richest men, I've heard, in the West—but he will probably leave his fortune to charity. As it is he doles out a pittance to Alan—not nearly enough for him to marry on."

"Isn't it strange," said Caroline, "that the nice people never seem to have enough money and the disagreeable ones seem to have a great deal too much? But I despise a man," she added sweepingly, "who hasn't enough spirit to go out into the world and fight."

The old lady's needles clicked sharply as she returned to her work. "I've always said that if the good Lord would look after my money troubles, I could take care of the others. Now, if Angelica's people had not been so poor she would have been spared this dreadful marriage. As it is, I am sure, the poor thing makes the best of it—I don't want you to think that I am saying a word against Angelica—but when a woman runs about after so many outside interests, it is pretty sure to mean that she is unhappy at home."

"It's a pity," said the younger woman musingly, "that so many of her interests seem to cross David's business. Look at this Ridley matter, for instance—of course everyone says that Angelica is trying to make up for her husband's injustice by supporting the family until the man gets back to work. It's perfectly splendid of her, I know. There isn't a living soul who admires Angelica more than I do, but with all the needy

families in town, it does seem that she might just as well have selected some other to look after."

The old lady, having dropped some stitches, went industriously to work to pick them up. "For all we know," she observed piously, "it may be God's way of punishing David."

CHAPTER VII

Caroline Makes Discoveries

At four o'clock Daisy Colfax rushed off to a committee meeting at Briarlay ("something very important, though I can't remember just which one it is"), and an hour later Caroline followed her in Blackburn's car, with Letty lying fast asleep in her arms.

"I am going to do all I can to make it easier for Mrs. Blackburn," she thought. "I don't care how rude he is to me if he will only spare her. I am stronger than she is, and I can bear it better." Already it seemed to her that this beautiful unhappy woman filled a place in her life, that she would be willing to make any sacrifice, to suffer any humiliation, if she could only help her.

Suddenly Letty stirred and put up a thin little hand. "I like you, Miss Meade," she said drowsily. "I like you because you are pretty and you laugh. Mammy says mother never laughs, that she only smiles. Why is that?"

"I suppose she doesn't think things funny, darling."

"When father laughs out loud she tells him to stop. She says it hurts her."

"Well, she isn't strong, you know. She is easily hurt."

"I am not strong either, but I like to laugh," said the child in her quaint manner. "Mammy says there isn't anybody's laugh so pretty as yours. It sounds like music."

"Then I must laugh a great deal for you, Letty, and the more we laugh together the happier we'll be, shan't we?"

As the car turned into the lane, where the sunlight fell in splinters over the yellow leaves, a man in working clothes appeared suddenly from under the trees. For an instant he seemed on the point of stopping them; then lowering the hand he had raised, he bowed hurriedly, and passed on at a brisk walk toward the road.

"His name is Ridley, I know him," said Letty. "Mother took me with her one day when she went to see his children. He has six children, and one is a baby. They let me hold it, but I like a doll better because dolls don't wriggle." Then, as the motor raced up the drive and stopped in front of the porch, she sat up and threw off the fur robe. "There are going to be cream puffs for tea, and mammy said I might have one. Do you think mother will mind if I go into the drawing-room? She is having a meeting."

"I don't know, dear. Is it a very important meeting?"

"It must be," replied Letty, "or mother wouldn't have it. Everything she has is important." As the door opened, she inquired of the servant, "Moses, do you think this is a very important meeting?"

Moses, a young light-coloured negro, answered solemnly, "Hit looks dat ar way ter me, Miss Letty, caze Patrick's jes' done fotched up de las' plate uv puffs. Dose puffs wuz gwine jes' as fast ez you kin count de las' time I tuck a look at um, en de ladies dey wuz all a-settin' roun' in va' yous attitudes en eatin' um up like dey tasted moughty good."

"Then I'm going in," said the child promptly. "You

come with me, Miss Meade. Mother won't mind half so much if you are with me." And grasping Caroline's hand she led the way to the drawing-room. "I hope they have left one," she whispered anxiously, "but meetings always seem to make people so hungry."

In the back drawing-room, where empty cups and plates were scattered about on little tables, Angelica was sitting in a pink and gold chair that vaguely resembled a throne. She wore a street gown of blue velvet, and beneath a little hat of dark fur, her hair folded softly on her temples. At the first glance Caroline could see that she was tired and nervous, and her pensive eyes seemed to plead with the gaily chattering women about her. "Of course, if you really think it will help the cause," she was saying deprecatingly; then as Letty entered, she broke off and held out her arms. "Did you have a good time, darling?"

The child went slowly forward, shaking hands politely with the guests while her steady gaze, so like her father's, sought the tea table. "May I have a puff and a tart too, mother?" she asked as she curtseyed to Mrs. Ashburton.

"No, only one, dear, but you may choose."

"Then I'll choose a puff because it is bigger." She was a good child, and when the tart was forbidden her, she turned her back on the plate with a determined gesture. "I saw the man, mother—the one with the baby. He was in the lane."

"I know, dear. He came to ask your father to take him back in the works. Perhaps if you were to go into the library and ask him very gently, he would do it. It is the case I was telling you about, a most distressing one," explained Angelica to Mrs. Ashburton. "Of

course David must have reason on his side or he wouldn't take the stand that he does. I suppose the man does drink and stir up trouble, but we women have to think of so much besides mere justice. We have to keep close to the human part that men are so apt to overlook." There was a writing tablet on her knee, and while she spoke, she leaned earnestly forward, and made a few straggling notes with a yellow pencil which was blunt at the point. Even her efficiency—and as a chairman she was almost as efficient as Mrs. Ashburton—was clothed in sweetness. As she sat there, holding the blunt pencil in her delicate, blue-veined hand, she appeared to be bracing herself, with a tremendous effort of will, for some inexorable demand of duty. The tired droop of her figure, the shadow under her eyes, the pathetic little lines that quivered about her mouth—these things, as well as the story of her loveless marriage, awakened Caroline's pity. "She bears it so beautifully," she thought, with a rush of generous emotion. "I have never seen any one so brave and noble. I believe she never thinks of herself for a minute."

"I always feel," observed Mrs. Ashburton, in her logical way which was trying at times, "that a man ought to be allowed to attend to his own business."

A pretty woman, with a sandwich in her hand, turned from the tea table and remarked lightly, "Heaven knows it is the last privilege of which I wish to deprive him!" Her name was Mallow, and she was a newcomer of uncertain origin, who had recently built a huge house, after the Italian style, on the Three Chopt Road. She was very rich, very smart, very dashing, and though her ancestry was dubious, both her house and her

hospitality were authentic. Alan had once said of her that she kept her figure by climbing over every charity in town; but Alan's wit was notoriously malicious.

"In a case like this, don't you think, dear Mrs. Ashburton, that a woman owes a duty to humanity?" asked Angelica, who liked to talk in general terms of the particular instance. "Miss Meade, I am sure, will agree with me. It is so important to look after the children."

"But there are so many children one might look after," replied Caroline gravely; then feeling that she had not responded generously to Angelica's appeal, she added, "I think it is splendid of you, perfectly splendid to feel the way that you do."

"That is so sweet of you," murmured Angelica gratefully, while Mrs. Aylett, a lovely woman, with a face like a magnolia flower and a typically Southern voice, said gently, "I, for one, have always found Angelica's unselfishness an inspiration. With her delicate health, it is simply marvellous the amount of good she is able to do. I can never understand how she manages to think of so many things at the same moment." She also held a pencil in her gloved hand, and wrote earnestly, in illegible figures, on the back of a torn envelope.

"Of course, we feel that!" exclaimed the other six or eight women in an admiring chorus. "That is why we are begging her to be in these tableaux."

It was a high-minded, unselfish group, except for Mrs. Mallow, who was hungry, and Daisy Colfax, who displayed now and then an inclination to giddiness. Not until Caroline had been a few minutes in the room did she discover that the committee had assembled to arrange an entertainment for the benefit of the Red

Cross. Though Mrs. Blackburn was zealous as an organizer, she confined her activities entirely to charitable associations and disapproved passionately of women who "interfered" as she expressed it "with public matters." She was disposed by nature to vague views and long perspectives, and instinctively preferred, except when she was correcting an injustice of her husband's, to right the wrongs in foreign countries.

"Don't you think she would make an adorable Peace?" asked Mrs. Aylett of Caroline.

"I really haven't time for it," said Angelica gravely, "but as you say, Milly dear, the cause is everything, and then David always likes me to take part in public affairs."

A look of understanding rippled like a beam of light over the faces of the women, and Caroline realized without being told that Mrs. Blackburn was overtaxing her strength in deference to her husband's wishes. "I suppose like most persons who haven't always had things he is mad about society."

"I've eaten it all up, mother," said Letty in a wistful voice. "It tasted very good."

"Did it, darling? Well, now I want you to go and ask your father about poor Ridley and his little children. You must ask him very sweetly, and perhaps he won't refuse. You would like to do that, wouldn't you?"

"May I take Miss Meade with me?"

"Yes, she may go with you. There, now, run away, dear. Mother is so busy helping the soldiers she hasn't time to talk to you."

"Why are you always so busy, mother?"

"She is so busy because she is doing good every

minute of her life," said Mrs. Aylett. "You have an angel for a mother, Letty."

The child turned to her with sudden interest. "Is father an angel too?" she inquired.

A little laugh, strangled abruptly in a cough, broke from Daisy Colfax, while Mrs. Mallow hastily swallowed a cake before she buried her flushed face in her handkerchief. Only Mrs. Aylett, without losing her composure, remarked admiringly, "That's a pretty dress you have on, Letty."

"Now run away, dear," urged Angelica in a pleading tone, and the child, who had been stroking her mother's velvet sleeve, moved obediently to the door before she looked back and asked, "Aren't you coming too, Miss Meade?"

"Yes, I'm coming too," answered Caroline, and while she spoke she felt that she had never before needed so thoroughly the discipline of the hospital. As she put her arm about Letty's shoulders, and crossed the hall to Blackburn's library, she hoped passionately that he would not be in the room. Then Letty called out "father!" in a clear treble, and almost immediately the door opened, and Blackburn stood on the threshold.

"Do you want to come in?" he asked. "I've got a stack of work ahead, but there is always time for a talk with you."

He turned back into the room, holding Letty by the hand, and as Caroline followed silently, she noticed that he seemed abstracted and worried, and that his face, when he glanced round at her, looked white and tired. The red-brown flush of the morning had faded, and he appeared much older.

"Won't you sit down," he asked, and then he threw

himself into a chair, and added cheerfully, "What is it, daughter? Have you a secret to tell me?"

Against the rich brown of the walls his head stood out, clear and fine, and something in its poise, and in the backward sweep of his hair, gave Caroline an impression of strength and swiftness as of a runner who is straining toward an inaccessible goal. For the first time since she had come to Briarlay he seemed natural and at ease in his surroundings—in the midst of the old books, the old furniture, the old speckled engravings—and she understood suddenly why Colonel Ashburton had called him an idealist. With the hardness gone from his eyes and the restraint from his thin-lipped, nervous mouth, he looked, as the Colonel had said of him, "on fire with ideas." He had evidently been at work, and the fervour of his mood was still visible in his face.

"Father, won't you please give Ridley his work again?" said the child. "I don't want his little children to be hungry." As she stood there at his knee, with her hands on his sleeve and her eyes lifted to his, she was so much like him in every feature that Caroline found herself vaguely wondering where the mother's part in her began. There was nothing of Angelica's softness in that intense little face, with its look of premature knowledge.

Bending over he lifted her to his knee, and asked patiently, "If I tell you why I can't take him back, Letty, will you try to understand?"

She nodded gravely. "I don't want the baby to be hungry."

For a moment he gazed over her head through the long windows that opened on the terrace. The sun

was just going down, and beyond the cluster of junipers the sky was turning slowly to orange.

"Miss Meade," he said abruptly, looking for the first time in Caroline's face, "would you respect a man who did a thing he believed to be unjust because someone he loved had asked him to?"

For an instant the swiftness of the question—the very frankness and simplicity of it—took Caroline's breath away. She was sitting straight and still in a big leather chair, and she seemed to his eyes a different creature from the woman he had watched in the garden that morning. Her hair was smooth now under her severe little hat, her face was composed and stern, and for the moment her look of radiant energy was veiled by the quiet capability of her professional manner.

"I suppose not," she answered fearlessly, "if one is quite sure that the thing is unjust."

"In this case I haven't a doubt. The man is a firebrand in the works. He drinks, and breeds lawlessness. There are men in jail now who would be at work but for him, and they also have families. If I take him back there are people who would say I do it for a political reason."

"Does that matter? It seems to me nothing matters except to be right."

He smiled, and she wondered how she could have thought that he looked older. "Yes, if I am right, nothing else matters, and I know that I am right." Then looking down at Letty, he said more slowly, "My child, I know another family of little children without a father. Wouldn't you just as soon go to see these children?"

"Is there a baby? A very small baby?"

"Yes, there is a baby. I am sending the elder children to school, and one of the girls is old enough to learn stenography. The father was a good man and a faithful worker. When he died he asked me to look after his family."

"Then why doesn't Mrs. Blackburn know about them?" slipped from Caroline's lips. "Why hasn't any one told her?"

The next instant she regretted the question, but before she could speak again Blackburn answered quietly, "She is not strong, and already she has more on her than she should have undertaken."

"Her sympathy is so wonderful!" Almost in spite of her will, against her instinct for reticence where she distrusted, against the severe code of her professional training, she began by taking Mrs. Blackburn's side in the household.

"Yes, she is wonderful." His tone was conventional, yet if he had adored his wife he could scarcely have said more to a stranger.

There was a knock at the door, and Mammy Riah inquired querulously through the crack, "Whar you, Letty? Ain't you comin' ter git yo' supper?"

"I'm here, I'm coming," responded Letty. As she slid hurriedly from her father's knees, she paused long enough to whisper in his ear, "Father, what shall I tell mother when she asks me?"

"Tell her, Letty, that I cannot do it because it would not be fair."

"Because it would not be fair," repeated the child obediently as she reached for Caroline's hand. "Miss Meade is going to have supper with me, father. We are

going to play that it is a party and let all the dolls come, and she will have bread and milk just as I do."

"Will she?" said Blackburn, with a smile. "Then I'd think she'd be hungry before bed-time."

Though he spoke pleasantly, Caroline was aware that his thoughts had wandered from them, and that he was as indifferent to her presence as he was to the faint lemon-coloured light streaming in at the window. It occurred to her suddenly that he had never really looked at her, and that if they were to meet by accident in the road he would not recognize her. She had never seen any one with so impersonal a manner—so encased and armoured in reserve—and she began to wonder what he was like under that impenetrable surface? "I should like to hear him speak," she thought, "to know what he thinks and feels about the things he cares for—about politics and public questions." He stood up as she rose, and for a minute before Letty drew her from the room, he smiled down on the child. "If I were Miss Meade, I'd demand more than bread and milk at your party, Letty." Then he turned away, and sat down again at his writing table.

An hour or two later, when Letty's supper was over, Angelica came in to say good-night before she went out to dinner. She was wearing an evening wrap of turquoise velvet and ermine, and a band of diamonds encircled the golden wings on her temples. Her eyes shone like stars, and there was a misty brightness in her face that made her loveliness almost unearthly. The fatigue of the afternoon had vanished, and she looked as young and fresh as a girl.

"I hope you are comfortable, Miss Meade," she said, with the manner of considerate gentleness which had

won Caroline from the first. "I told Fanny to move you into the little room next to Letty's."

"Yes, I am quite comfortable. I like to sleep where she can call me."

The child was undressing, and as her mother bent over her, she put up her bare little arms to embrace her. "You smell so sweet, mother, just like lilacs."

"Do I, darling? There, don't hug me so tight or you'll rumple my hair. Did you ask your father about Ridley?"

"He won't do it. He says he won't do it because it wouldn't be fair." As Letty repeated the message she looked questioningly into Mrs. Blackburn's face. "Why wouldn't it be fair, mother?"

"He will have to tell you, dear, I can't." Drawing back from the child's arms, she arranged the ermine collar over her shoulders. "We must do all we can to help them, Letty. Now, kiss me very gently, and try to sleep well."

She went out, leaving a faint delicious trail of lilacs in the air, and while Caroline watched Mammy Riah slip the night-gown over Letty's shoulders, her thoughts followed Angelica down the circular drive, through the lane, and on the road to the city. She was fascinated, yet there was something deeper and finer than fascination in the emotion Mrs. Blackburn awakened. There was tenderness in it and there was romance; but most of all there was sympathy. In Caroline's narrow and colourless life, so rich in character, so barren of incident, this sympathy was unfolding like some rare and exquisite blossom.

"Did you ever see any one in your life look so lovely?" she asked enthusiastically of Mammy Riah.

The old woman was braiding Letty's hair into a tight little plait, which she rolled over at the end and tied up with a blue ribbon. "I wan' bawn yestiddy, en I reckon I'se done seen er hull pa'cel un um," she replied. "Miss Angy's de patte'n uv whut 'er ma wuz befo' 'er. Dar ain' never been a Fitzhugh yit dat wan't ez purty ez a pictur w'en dey wuz young, en Miss Angy she is jes' like all de res' un um. But she ain' been riz right, dat's de gospel trufe, en I reckon ole Miss knows hit now way up yonder in de Kingdom Come. Dey hed a w'ite nuss to nuss 'er de same ez dey's got for Letty heah, en dar ain' never been a w'ite nuss yit ez could raise a chile right, nairy a one un um."

"But I thought you nursed all the Fitzhughs? Why did they have a white nurse for Mrs. Blackburn?"

"Dy wuz projeckin', honey, like dey is projeckin' now wid dis yer chile. Atter I done nuss five er dem chillun ole Miss begun ter git sort er flighty in her haid, en ter go plum 'stracted about sto' physick en real doctahs. Stop yo' foolishness dis minute, Letty. You git spang out er dat baid befo' I mek you, en say yo' pray'rs. Yas'm, hit's de gospel trufe, I'se tellin' you," she concluded as Letty jumped obediently out of bed and prepared to kneel down on the rug. "Ef'n dey hed lemme raise Miss Angy de fambly wouldn't hev run ter seed de way hit did atter old Marster died, en dar 'ouldn't be dese yer low-lifeted doin's now wid Marse David."

Later in the night, lying awake and restless in the little room next to Letty's, Caroline recalled the old woman's comment. Though she had passionately taken Angelica's side, it was impossible for her to deny that both Mrs. Timberlake and Mammy Riah appeared to lean sympathetically at least in the direction of Blackburn.

There was nothing definite—nothing particularly suggestive even—to which she could point; yet, in spite of her prejudice, in spite of the sinister stories which circulated so freely in Richmond, she was obliged to admit that the two women who knew Angelica best—the dependent relative and the old negress—did not espouse her cause so ardently as did the adoring committee. "The things they say must be true. Such dreadful stories could never have gotten out unless something or somebody had started them. It is impossible to look in Mrs. Blackburn's face and not see that she is a lovely character, and that she is very unhappy." Then a reassuring thought occurred to her, for she remembered that her mother used to say that a negro mammy always took the side of the father in any discussion. "It must be the same thing here with Mrs. Timberlake and Mammy Riah. They are so close to Mrs. Blackburn that they can't see how lovely she is. It is like staying too long in the room with an exquisite perfume. One becomes at last not only indifferent, but insensible to its sweetness." Closing her eyes, she resolutely put the question away, while she lived over again, in all its varied excitement, her first day at Briarlay. The strangeness of her surroundings kept her awake, and it seemed to her, as she went over the last twenty-four hours, that she was years older than she had been when she left The Cedars. Simply meeting Mrs. Blackburn, she told herself again, was a glorious adventure; it was like seeing and speaking to one of the heroines in the dingy old volumes in her father's library. And the thought that she could really serve her, that she could understand and sympathize where Mrs. Timberlake and Mammy Riah failed, that she

could, by her strength and devotion, lift a share of the burden from Angelica's shoulders—the thought of these things shed an illumination over the bare road of the future. She would do good, she resolved, and in doing good, she would find happiness. The clock struck eleven; she heard the sound of the returning motor; and then, with her mind filled with visions of usefulness, she dropped off to sleep.

It might have been a minute later, it might have been hours, when she was awakened by Letty's voice screaming in terror. Jumping out of bed, Caroline slipped into the wrapper of blue flannel Diana had made for her, and touching the electric button, flooded the nursery with light. Sitting very erect, with wide-open vacant eyes, and outstretched arms, Letty was uttering breathless, distracted shrieks. Her face was frozen into a mask, and the bones of her thin little body quivered through the cambric of her night-gown. As the shadows leaped out on the walls, which were covered with garlands of pink and blue flowers, she shuddered and crouched back under the blankets.

"I am here, Letty! I am here, darling!" cried Caroline, kneeling beside the bed, and at the same instant the door opened, and Mammy Riah, half dressed, and without wig or turban, came in muttering, "I'se coming, honey! I'se coming, my lamb!"

Without noticing them, the child cried out in a loud, clear voice, "Where is father? I want father to hold me! I want my father!" Then the terror swept over her again like some invisible enemy, and her cries became broken and inarticulate.

"Is she often like this?" asked Caroline of the old woman. "I can't hold her. I am afraid she will have

a convulsion." With her arms about Letty, who moaned and shivered in her grasp, she added, "Letty, darling, shall I send for your mother?"

"Dar ain' but one thing dat'll quiet dis chile," said the old negress, "en dat is Marse David. I'se gwine atter Marse David."

She hobbled out in her lint slippers, while the girl held Letty closer, and murmured a hundred soothing words in her ear. "You may have father and mother too," she said, "you may have everyone, dear, if only you won't be frightened."

"I don't want everyone. I want father," cried the child, with a storm of sobs. "I want father because I am afraid. I want him to keep me from being afraid." Then, as the door opened, and Blackburn came into the room, she held out her arms, and said in a whisper, like the moan of a small hurt animal, "I thought you had gone away, father, and I was afraid of the dark."

Without speaking, Blackburn crossed the room, and dropping into a chair by the bed, laid his arm across the child's shoulders. At his touch her cries changed into shivering sobs which grew gradually fainter, and slipping back on the pillows, she looked with intent, searching eyes in his face. "You haven't gone away, father?"

"No, I haven't gone anywhere. You were dreaming."

Clasping his hand, she laid her cheek on it, and nestled under the cover. "I am afraid to go to sleep because I dream such ugly dreams."

"Dreams can't hurt you, Letty. No matter how ugly they are, they are only dreams."

His voice was low and firm, and at the first sound of it

the pain and fear faded from Letty's face. "Were you asleep, father?"

"No, I was at work. I am writing a speech. It is twelve o'clock, but I had not gone to bed." He spoke quite reasonably as if she were a grown person, and Caroline asked herself if this explained his power over the child. There was no hint of stooping, no pretense of childish words or phrases. He looked very tired and deep lines showed in his face, but there was an inexhaustible patience in his manner. For the first time she thought of him as a man who carried a burden. His very shadow, which loomed large and black on the flowered wall paper, appeared, while she watched it, to bend beneath the pressure of an invisible weight.

"Has mother come in?" asked Letty in a still whisper.

"Yes, she has gone to bed. You must not wake your mother."

"I'll try not to," answered the child, and a minute afterwards she said with a yawn, "I feel sleepy now, father. I'd like to go to sleep, if you'll sit by me."

He laughed. "I'll sit by you, if you'll let Miss Meade and Mammy Riah go to bed."

As if his laugh had driven the last terror from her mind, Letty made a soft, breathless sound of astonishment. "Miss Meade has got on a wrapper," she said, "and her hair is plaited just like mine only there isn't any ribbon. Mammy Riah, do you think my hair would stay plaited like that if it wasn't tied?"

The old woman grunted. "Ef'n you don' shet yo' mouf, I'se gwine ter send Marse David straight down agin whar he b'longs."

"Well, I'll go to sleep," replied Letty, in her docile

way; and a minute later, she fell asleep with her cheek on her father's hand.

For a quarter of an hour longer Blackburn sat there without stirring, while Caroline put out the high lights and turned on the shaded lamp by the bed. Then, releasing himself gently, he stood up and said in a whisper, "I think she is all right now." His back was to the lamp, and Caroline saw his face by the dim flicker of the waning fire.

"I shall stay with her," she responded in the same tone.

"It is not necessary. After an attack like this she sleeps all night from exhaustion. She seems fast asleep, but if you have trouble again send for me."

He moved softly to the door, and as Caroline looked after him, she found herself asking resentfully, "I wonder why Letty cried for her father?"

CHAPTER VIII

Blackburn

A week later, on an afternoon when the October sunshine sparkled like wine beneath a sky that was the colour of day-flowers, Caroline sat on the terrace waiting for Mrs. Blackburn to return from a rehearsal. In the morning Angelica had promised Letty a drive if she were good, and as soon as luncheon was over the child had put on a new hat and coat of blue velvet, and had come downstairs to listen for the sound of the motor. With a little white fur muff in her hands, she was now marching sedately round the fountain, while she counted her circuits aloud in a clear, monotonous voice. Under the velvet hat she was looking almost pretty, and as Caroline gazed at her she seemed to catch fleeting glimpses of Angelica in the serious little face. "I believe she is going to be really lovely when she grows up. It is a pity she hasn't her mother's colouring, but she gets more like her every day." Leaning over, she called in a low, admonishing tone, "Letty, don't go too near the fountain. You will get your coat splashed."

Obedient as she always was, Letty drew away from the water, and Caroline turned to pick up the knitting she had laid aside while she waited. Angelica had promised a dozen mufflers to the War Relief Association, and since it made her nervous to knit, she gracefully left the work for others to do. Now, while Caroline's needles clicked busily, and the ball of yarn unwound in

her lap, her eyes wandered from the dying beauty of the garden to the wreaths of smoke that hung over the fringed edge of the river. On the opposite side, beyond the glittering band of the water, low grey-green hills melted like shadows into the violet haze of the distance. A roving fragrance of wood-smoke was in the air, and from the brown and russet sweep of the fields rose the chanting of innumerable insects. All the noise and movement of life seemed hushed and waiting while nature drifted slowly into the long sleep of winter. So vivid yet so evanescent was the light on the meadows that Caroline stopped her work, lest a stir or a sound might dissolve the perfect hour into darkness.

Growing suddenly tired of play, Letty came to Caroline's side and leaned on her shoulder. The child's hat had slipped back, and while she nestled there she sank gradually into the pensive drowsiness of the afternoon.

"Do you think she has forgotten to come for us?"

"No, dear, it is early yet. It can't be much after three o'clock."

Up through the golden-rod and life-everlasting, along the winding pathway across the fields, Alan and Mary were strolling slowly toward the lower garden. "They are so happy," mused Caroline. "I wonder if she is ever afraid that she may lose him? He doesn't look as if he could be constant."

Suddenly one of the nearest French windows opened, and the scent of cigar smoke floated out from the library. A moment later she heard the words, "Let's get a bit of air," and Blackburn, followed by two callers, came out on the terrace. While the three stood gazing across the garden to the river, she recognized one of the

callers as Colonel Ashburton, but the other was a stranger—a tall, slender man, with crisp iron-grey hair and thin, austere features. Afterwards she learned that he was Joseph Sloane of New York, a man of wide political vision, and a recognized force in the industrial life of America. He had a high, dome-like forehead, which vaguely reminded Caroline of a tower, and a mouth so tightly locked that it looked as if nothing less rigid than a fact had ever escaped it. Yet his voice, when it came, was rich and beautifully modulated. "It is a good view," he remarked indifferently, and then looking at Blackburn, as if he were resuming a conversation that had been broken off, he said earnestly, "A few years ago I should have thought it a sheer impossibility, but I believe now that there is a chance of our winning."

"With the chance strengthening every hour," observed Colonel Ashburton, and as he turned his back to the view, his mild and innocent gaze fell on Caroline's figure. "It is good to see you, Miss Meade," he said gallantly, with a bow in which his blue eyes and silvery hair seemed to mingle. "I hope the sound of politics will not frighten you?"

Caroline looked up with a smile from her knitting. "Not at all. I was brought up in the midst of discussions. But are we in the way?"

The Colonel's gallantry was not without romantic flavour. "It is your Eden, and we are the intruders," he answered softly. It was a pity, thought Caroline, while she looked at him over Letty's head, that a velvet manner like that had almost vanished from the world. It went with plumes and lace ruffles and stainless swords.

"I am going to drive, father," called Letty, "if mother ever comes."

"That's good." Blackburn smiled as he responded, and then moving a step or two nearer the garden, drew several deep wicker chairs into the sunshine. For a few minutes after they had seated themselves, the men gazed in silence at the hazy hills on the horizon, and it seemed to Caroline that Blackburn was drawing strength and inspiration from the radiant, familiar scene.

"I have never wanted anything like this," he said at last, speaking very slowly, as if he weighed each separate word before it was uttered.

"Not for yourself, but for the country," replied the Colonel in his musical voice, which sounded always as if it were pitched to arouse sleeping enthusiasm. He had once been in Congress, and the habit of oratorical phrasing had never entirely left him. "Do you know, Blackburn, I sometimes think that you are one of the few statesmen we have left. The others are mixtures of so many ingredients—ambition, prejudice, fanaticism, self-interest—everything but the thought of the country, and the things for which the country should stand. It's the difference, I suppose, between a patriot and a politician."

"It is not that I am less selfish," Blackburn laughed with embarrassment as he answered, "but perhaps I have had a harder time than the others, and have learned something they haven't. I've seen how little material things or their acquisition matter in life. After all, the idea is the only thing that really counts—an idea big enough to lift a man out of his personal boundaries, big enough to absorb and possess him completely. A

man's country may do this, but not a man's self, nor the mere business of living."

As he paused, though his head was turned in Caroline's direction, she had a queer impression that he was looking beyond her at some glowing vision that was imperceptible to the others. She knew that he was oblivious of her presence, and that, if he saw her at all, she was scarcely more to him than an image painted on air. The golden light of the afternoon enveloped his figure, yet she realized that the illumination in his face was not due to the shifting rays of the sun. She did not like him—the aversion she felt was too strong for her to judge him tolerantly—but she was obliged to admit that his straight, firm figure, with its look of arrested energy, of controlled power, made Colonel Ashburton and the stranger from the North appear almost commonplace. Even his rough brown clothes possessed a distinction apart from the cut of his tailor; and though it was impossible for her to define the quality which seemed to make him stand alone, to put him in a class by himself, she was beginning to discern that his gift of personality, of intellectual dominance, was a kind of undeveloped genius. "He ought to have been a writer or a statesman," she thought, while she looked at his roughened hair, which would never lie flat, at his smoky grey eyes, and his thin, almost colourless lips. It was a face that grew on her as she watched it, a face, she realized, that one must study to understand, not attempt to read by erring flashes of insight. She remembered that Colonel Ashburton had told her that Blackburn had no small talk, but that he spoke well if he were once started on a current of ideas. "It is true. He speaks just as if he had thought it all out years ago,"

she said to herself while she listened, "just as if every sentence, every word almost, was crystallized." She felt a mild curiosity about his political convictions—a desire to know what he really believed, and why his opinions had aroused the opposition of men like Charles Peyton and Robert Colfax.

"I used to believe, not long ago, that these things counted supremely," Blackburn said presently, with his eyes on the river—those intense grey eyes which seemed always searching for something. "I held as firmly as any man by the Gospel of Achievement—by the mad scramble to acquire things. I had never had them, and what a man hasn't had, he generally wants. Perhaps I travelled the historic road through materialism to idealism, the road America is following this very hour while we are talking. I am not saying that it isn't all for the best, you know. You may call me an optimist, I suppose, down beneath the eternal muddle of things; but I feel that the ambition to acquire is good only as a process, and not as a permanent condition or the ultimate end of life. I haven't a doubt that the frantic struggle in America to amass things, to make great fortunes, has led to discoveries of incalculable benefit to mankind, and has given a splendid impetus to the development of our country. We wanted things so passionately that we were obliged to create them in order to satisfy our desires. This spirit, this single phase of development, is still serving a purpose. We have watched it open the earth, build railroads, establish industries, cut highways over mountains, turn deserts into populous cities; and through these things lay the foundation of the finer and larger social order—the greater national life. We are fond of speaking of

the men who have made this possible as money-grubbers or rank materialists. Some of them were, perhaps, but not the guiding spirits, the real builders. No man can do great constructive work who is not seeking to express an imperishable idea in material substance. No man can build for to-morrow who builds only with bricks and mortar."

He leaned forward to flick the ashes from his cigar, while the sunshine sprinkling through the junipers deepened the rapt and eager look in his face. "It all comes back to this—the whole problem of life," he pursued after a moment. "It all comes back to the builders. We are—with apologies for the platitude——a nation of idealists. It is our ability to believe in the incredible, to dream great dreams, not our practical efficiency, that has held our body politic together. Because we build in the sky, I believe we are building to last——"

"But our mistakes, our follies, our insanities——?" As Blackburn paused the voice of Colonel Ashburton fell like music on the stillness. "Even our fairest dreams—the dream of individual freedom—what has become of it? Show me the man who is free among us to-day?" With his bowed white head, his blanched aristocratic features, and his general air of having been crushed and sweetened by adversity, he reminded Caroline of one of the perpetual mourners, beside the weeping willow and the classic tomb, on the memorial brooch her great-grandmother used to wear.

"I believe you are wrong," replied Blackburn slowly, "for, in spite of the voice of the demagogue, America is a land of individual men, not of classes, and the whole theory of the American State rests upon the rights and

obligations of the citizen. If the American Republic survives, it will be because it is founded upon the level of conscience—not upon the peaks of inspiration. We have no sovereign mind, no governing class, no body of men with artificial privileges and special obligations. Every American carries in his person the essential elements of the State, and is entrusted with its duties. To this extent at least, Colonel, your man is free."

"Free to sink, or to swim with the current?"

Blackburn smiled as he answered. "Well, I suppose your pessimism is natural. In Colonel Ashburton, Sloane, you behold a sorrowful survivor of the Age of Heroes. By Jove, there were giants in those days!" Then he grew serious again, and went on rapidly, with the earnest yet impersonal note in his voice: "Of course, we know that as long as a people is striving for its civil rights, for equality of right before the law, there is a definite objective goal. Now, in theory at least, these things have been attained, and we are confronted to-day with the more difficult task of adjusting the interests, without impairing the rights, of the individual man. The tangled skeins of social and economic justice must be unravelled before we can weave them into the fabric of life."

"And for the next fifty years this is our business," said Sloane, speaking suddenly in the rich, strong voice which seemed to strike with unerring blows at the root of the question.

"Yes, this is our business for the next fifty years. I believe with you, Sloane, that this may be done. I believe that this work will be accomplished when, and only when, the citizen recognizes that he is the State, and is charged with the duties and the obliga-

tions of the State to his fellowmen. To reach this end we must overthrow class prejudice, and realize that justice to all alike is the cornerstone of democracy. We must put aside sectional feeling and create a national ideal by merging the State into the nation. We must learn to look beyond the material prosperity of America and discern her true destiny as the champion of the oppressed, the giver of light. It is for us to do this. After all, we are America, you and I and Ashburton and the man who works in my garden. When all is said, a nation is only an organized crowd, and can rise no higher, or sink no lower, than its source—the spirit of the men who compose it. As a man thinketh in his heart so his country will be."

For a moment there was silence, and then Sloane said sharply: "There is one thing that always puzzles me in you Southerners, and that is the apparent conflict between the way you think and the way you act, or to put it a trifle more accurately, between your political vision and your habit of voting. You see I am a practical man, an inveterate believer in the fact as the clinching argument in any question, and I confess that I have failed so far to reconcile your theory with your conduct. You are nationalists and idealists in theory, you Virginians, yet by your votes you maintain the solid South, as you call it, as if it were not a part of the American Republic. You cherish and support this heresy regardless of political issues, and often in defiance of your genuine convictions. I like you Virginians. Your history fascinates me like some brilliantly woven tapestry; but I can never understand how this people, whose heroic qualities helped to create the Union, can remain separated, at least in act, from American purposes

and ideals. You give the lie to your great statesmen; you shatter their splendid dream for the sake of a paradox. Your one political party battens on the very life of the South—since you preserve its independence in spite of representatives whom you oppose, and, not infrequently, in spite even of principles that you reject. However broad may be our interpretation of recent events, as long as this heresy prevails, the people of the South cannot hope to recover their historic place in the councils of the nation. And this condition," he concluded abruptly, "retards the development of our future. A short while ago—so short a while, indeed, as the year 1896—the security of the nation was endangered by the obsession of a solid and unbreakable South. This danger passed yesterday, but who knows when it may come again?"

As he finished, Blackburn leaned eagerly forward as if he were bracing himself to meet an antagonist. To the man whose inner life is compacted of ideas, the mental surgery of the man of facts must always appear superficial—a mere trick of technique. A new light seemed to have fallen over him, and, through some penetrating sympathy, Caroline understood that he lived in a white blaze not of feeling, but of thought. It was a passion of the mind instead of the heart, and she wondered if he had ever loved Angelica as he loved this fugitive, impersonal image of service?

"I sometimes doubt," he said gravely, "if a man can ever understand a country unless he was born in it—unless its sun and dust have entered into his being."

"And yet we Southerners, even old-fashioned ones like myself, see these evils as clearly as you Northerners," interposed Colonel Ashburton while Blackburn

hesitated. "The difference between us is simply that you discern the evils only, and we go deep enough to strike the root of the trouble. If you want really to understand us, Sloane, study the motive forces in English and American history, especially the overpowering influence of racial instinct, and the effect of an injustice on the mind of the Anglo-Saxon."

With the Colonel's voice the old sense of familiarity pervaded Caroline's memory like a perfume, and she seemed to be living again through one of her father's political discussions at The Cedars—only the carefully enunciated phrases of Sloane and Blackburn were more convincing than the ringing, colloquial tones of the country orators. As she listened she told herself that these men were modern and constructive while her father and his group of Confederate soldiers had been stationary and antiquated. They had stood like crumbling landmarks of history, while Blackburn and his associates were building the political structure of the future.

"Of course I admit," Sloane was saying frankly, "that mistakes were made in the confusion that followed the Civil War. Nobody regrets these things more than the intelligent men of the North; but all this is past; a new generation is springing up; and none of us desires now to put your house in order, or force any government upon you. The North is perfectly willing to keep its hands off your domestic affairs, and to leave the race problem to you, or to anybody else who possesses the ability to solve it. It seems to me, therefore, that the time has come to put these things behind us, and to recognize that we are, and have been, at least since 1865, a nation. There are serious problems before

us to-day, and the successful solution of these demands unity of thought and purpose."

There was a slight ironic twist to his smile as he finished, and he sat perfectly still, with the burned-out cigar in his hand, watching Blackburn with a look that was at once sympathetic and merciless.

"Colonel Ashburton has pointed out the only way," rejoined Blackburn drily. "You must use the past as a commentary before you can hope clearly to interpret the present."

"That is exactly what I am trying to do." The irony had vanished, and a note of solemnity had passed into Sloane's voice. "I am honestly trying to understand the source of the trouble, to discover how it may be removed. I see in the solid South not a local question, but a great national danger. There is no sanctity in a political party; it is merely an instrument to accomplish the ends of government through the will of the people. I realize how men may follow one party or another under certain conditions; but no party can always be right, and I cannot understand how a people, jealous of its freedom, intensely patriotic in spirit, can remain through two generations in bondage to one political idea, whether that idea be right or wrong. This seems to me to be beyond mere politics, to rise to the dignity of a national problem. I feel that it requires the best thought of the country for its adjustment. It is because we need your help that I am speaking so frankly. If we go into this war—and there are times when it seems to me that it will be impossible for us to keep out of it—it must be a baptism of fire from which we should emerge clean, whole, and united."

"Ashburton is fond of telling me," said Blackburn slowly, "that I live too much in the next century, yet it does not seem to me unreasonable to believe that the chief end of civilization is the development of the citizen, and of a national life as deeply rooted in personal consciousness as the life of the family. The ideal citizen, after all, is merely a man in whom the patriotic nerve has become as sensitive as the property nerve —a man who brings his country in touch with his actual life, who places the public welfare above his private aims and ambitions. It is because I believe the Southern character is rich in the material for such development that I entered this fight two years ago. As you know I am not a Democrat. I have broken away from the party, and recently, I have voted the Republican ticket at Presidential elections——"

"This is why I am here to-day," continued Sloane. "I am here because we need your help, because we see an opportunity for you to aid in the great work ahead of us. With a nation the power to survive rests in the whole, not in the parts, and America will not become America until she has obliterated the sections."

Blackburn was gazing at the hills on the horizon, while there flickered and waned in his face a look that was almost prophetic.

"Well, of course I agree with you," he said in a voice which was so detached and contemplative that it seemed to flow from the autumnal stillness, "but before you can obliterate the sections, the North as well as the South must cease to be sectional—especially must the North, which has so long regarded its control of the Federal Government as a proprietary right, cease to exclude the South from participation in national affairs and

movements. Before you can obliterate the sections, you must, above all, understand why the solidarity of the South exists as a political issue—you must probe beneath the tissue of facts to the very bone and fibre of history. Truth is sometimes an inconvenient thing, but experience has found nothing better to build on. First of all—for we must clear the ground—first of all, you must remember that we Virginians are Anglo-Saxons, and that we share the sporting spirit which is ready to fight for a principle, and to accept the result whether it wins or loses. When the war was over—to dig no deeper than the greatest fact in our past—when the war was over we Virginians, and the people of the South, submitted, like true sportsmen, to the logic of events. We had been beaten on the principle that we had no right to secede from the Union, and therefore were still a part of the Union. We accepted this principle, and were ready to resume our duties and discharge our obligations; but this was not to be permitted without the harsh provisions of the Reconstruction acts. Then followed what is perhaps the darkest period in American history, and one of the darkest periods in the history of the English-speaking race——"

"I admit all this," interrupted Sloane quickly, "and yet I cannot understand——"

"You must understand before we work together," replied Blackburn stubbornly. "I shall make you understand if it takes me all night and part of tomorrow. Politics, after all, is not merely a store of mechanical energy; even a politician is a man first and an automaton afterwards. You can't separate the way a man votes from the way he feels; and the way he feels

has its source in the secret springs of his character, in the principles his parents revered, in the victories, the shames, the sufferings and the evasions of history. Until you realize that the South is human, you will never understand why it is solid. People are ruled not by intellect, but by feeling; and in a democracy mental expediency is no match for emotional necessity. Virginia proved this philosophical truth when she went into the war—when she was forced, through ties of blood and kinship, into defending the institution of slavery because it was strangely associated with the principle of self-government—and she proved it yet again when she began slowly to rebuild the shattered walls of her commonwealth."

For a moment he was silent, and Colonel Ashburton said softly with the manner of one who pours oil on troubled waters with an unsteady hand, "I remember those years more clearly than I remember last month or even yesterday."

His voice trailed into silence, and Blackburn went on rapidly, without noticing the interruption: "The conditions of the Reconstruction period were worse than war, and for those conditions you must remember that the South has always held the Republican Party responsible. Not content with the difficulties which would inevitably result from the liberation of an alien population among a people who had lost all in war, and were compelled to adjust themselves to new economic and social conditions, the Federal Government, under the influence of intemperate leaders, conferred upon the negroes full rights of citizenship, while it denied these rights to a large proportion of the white population—the former masters. State and local

governments were under the control of the most ignorant classes, generally foreign adventurers who were exploiting the political power of the negroes. The South was overwhelmed with debts created for the private gain of these adventurers; the offices of local governments were filled either by alien white men or by negroes; and negro justices of the peace, negro legislators, and even negro members of Congress were elected. My own county was represented in the Legislature of Virginia by a negro who had formerly belonged to my father.'"

"All this sounds now like the ancient history of another continent," remarked Sloane with anxious haste, "Fifty years can change the purpose of a people or a party!"

"Often in the past," resumed Blackburn, "men who have taken part in revolutions or rebellions have lost their lives as the punishment of failure; but there are wrongs worse than death, and one of these is to subject a free and independent people to the rule of a servile race; to force women and children to seek protection from magistrates who had once been their slaves. The Republican Party was then in control, and its leaders resisted every effort of the South to re-establish the supremacy of the white race, and to reassert the principles of self-government. We had the Civil Rights Act, and the Federal Election Laws, with Federal supervisors of elections to prevent the white people from voting and to give the vote to the negroes. Even when thirty years had passed, and the South had gained control of its local governments, the Republicans attempted to pass an election law which would have perpetuated negro dominance. You have only to stop

and think for a minute, and you will understand that conditions such as I have suggested are the source of that national menace you are trying now to remove."

"It is all true, but it is the truth of yesterday," rejoined Sloane eagerly. "If we have made mistakes in the past, we wish the more heartily to do right in the present. What can prove this more clearly than the fact that I am here to ask your help in organizing the independent vote in Virginia? There is a future for the man who can lead the new political forces."

The sun was dropping slowly in the direction of the wooded slopes on the opposite shore; the violet mist on the river had become suddenly luminous; and the long black shadows of the junipers were slanting over the grass walks in the garden. In the lower meadows the chanting rose so softly that it seemed rather a breath than a sound; and this breath, which was the faint quivering stir of October, stole at last into the amber light on the terrace.

"If I had not known this," answered Blackburn, and again there flickered into his face the look of prophecy and vision which seemed to place him in a separate world from Sloane and Colonel Ashburton, "I should have spoken less frankly. As you say the past is past, and we cannot solve future problems by brooding upon wrongs that are over. The suffrage is, after all, held in trust for the good of the present and the future; and for this reason, since Virginia limited her suffrage to a point that made the negro vote a negligible factor, I have felt that the solid South is, if possible, more harmful to the Southern people than it is to the nation. This political solidarity prevents constructive thought and retards development. It places the Southern States in the

control of one political machine; and the aim of this machine must inevitably be self-perpetuation. Offices are bestowed on men who are willing to submit to these methods; and freedom of discussion is necessarily discouraged by the dominant party. In the end a governing class is created, and this class, like all political cliques, secures its privileges by raising small men to high public places, and thereby obstructs, if it does not entirely suppress, independent thought and action. I can imagine no more dangerous condition for any people under a republican form of government, and for this reason, I regard the liberation of the South from this political tyranny as the imperative duty of every loyal Southerner. As you know, I am an independent in politics, and if I have voted with the Republicans, it is only because I saw no other means of breaking the solidarity of the South. Yet—and I may as well be as frank at the end as I was at the beginning of our discussion, I doubt the ability of the Republican Party to win the support of the Southern people. The day will come, I believe, when another party will be organized, national in its origin and its purposes; and through this new party, which will absorb the best men from both the Republican and the Democratic organizations, I hope to see America welded into a nation. In the meantime, and only until this end is clearly in sight," he added earnestly, "I am ready to help you by any effort, by any personal sacrifice. I believe in America not with my mind only, but with my heart—and if the name America means anything, it must mean that we stand for the principle of self-government whatever may be the form. This principle is now in danger throughout the world, and just as a man must

meet his responsibilities and discharge his obligations regardless of consequences, so a nation cannot shirk its duties in a time of international peril. We have now reached the cross-roads—we stand waiting where the upward and the downward paths come together. I am willing to cast aside all advantage, to take any step, to face misunderstanding and criticism, if I can only help my people to catch the broader vision of American opportunity and American destiny——"

The words were still in the air, when there was a gentle flutter of pink silk curtains, and Angelica came out, flushed and lovely, from a successful rehearsal. An afternoon paper was in her hand, and her eyes were bright and wistful, as if she were trying to understand how any one could have hurt her.

"Letty, dear, I am waiting!" she called; and then, as her gaze fell on Sloane, she went toward him with outstretched hand and a charming manner of welcome. "Oh, Mr. Sloane, how very nice to see you in Richmond!" The next instant she added seriously, "David, have you seen the paper? You can't imagine what dreadful things they are saying about you."

"Well, they can call him nothing worse than a traitor," retorted Colonel Ashburton lightly before Blackburn could answer. "Surely, the word traitor ought to have lost its harshness to Southern ears!"

"But Robert Colfax must have written it!" Though she was smiling it was not because the Colonel's rejoinder had seemed amusing to her. "I know I am interrupting," she said after a moment. "It will be so nice if you will dine with us, Mr. Sloane—only you must promise me not to encourage David's political ideas. I couldn't bear to be married to a politician."

As she stood there against a white column, she looked as faultless and as evanescent as the sunbeams, and for the first time Sloane's face lost its coldness and austerity.

"I think your husband could never be a politician," he answered gently, "though he may be a statesman."

CHAPTER IX

Angelica's Charity

As the car turned into the lane it passed Alan and Mary, and Mrs. Blackburn ordered the chauffeur to stop while she leaned out of the window and waited, with her vague, shimmering look, for the lovers to approach. "I wanted to ask you, Mr. Wythe, about that article in the paper this morning," she began. "Do you think it will do David any real harm?"

Her voice was low and troubled, and she gazed into Alan's face with eyes that seemed to be pleading for mercy.

"Well, I hardly think it will help him if he wants an office," replied Alan, reddening under her gaze. "I suppose everything is fair in politics, but it does seem a little underhand of Colfax doesn't it? A man has a right to expect a certain amount of consideration from his friends."

For the first time since she had known him, Caroline felt that Alan's nimble wit was limping slightly. In place of his usual light-hearted manner, he appeared uncomfortable and embarrassed, and though his eyes never left Angelica's face, they rested there with a look which it was impossible to define. Admiration, surprise, pleasure, and a fleeting glimpse of something like dread or fear—all these things Caroline seemed to read in that enigmatical glance. Could it be that he was comparing Angelica with Mary, and that, for the mo-

ment at least, Mary's lack of feminine charm, was estranging him? He looked splendidly vigorous with the flush in his cheeks and a glow in his red-brown eyes —just the man, Caroline fancied, with whom any woman might fall in love.

"But don't you think," asked Angelica hesitatingly, as if she dared not trust so frail a thing as her own judgment, "that it may be a matter of principle with Robert? Of course I know that David feels that he is right, and there can't be a bit of truth in what people say about the way he runs his works, but, after all, isn't he really harming the South by trying to injure the Democratic Party? We all feel, of course, that it is so important not to do anything to discredit the Democrats, and with Robert I suppose there is a great deal of sentiment mixed with it all because his grandfather did so much for Virginia. Oh, if David could only find some other ambition—something that wouldn't make him appear disloyal and ungrateful! I can't tell you how it distresses me to see him estrange his best friends as he does. I can't feel in my heart that any political honour is worth it!"

There was a flute-like quality in her voice, which was singularly lacking in the deeper and richer tones of passion, like the imperfect chords of some thin, sweet music. Though Angelica had the pensive eyes and the drooping profile of an early Italian Madonna, her voice, in spite of its lightness and delicacy, was without softness. At first it had come as a surprise to Caroline, and even now, after three weeks at Briarlay, she was aware of a nervous expectancy whenever Mrs. Blackburn opened her lips—of a furtive hope that the hard, cold tones might melt in the heat of some ardent impulse.

"It isn't ambition with David," said Mary, speaking bluntly, and with an arrogant conviction. "He doesn't care a rap for any political honour, and he is doing this because he believes it to be his duty. His country is more to him, I think, than any living creature could be, even a friend."

"Well, as far as that goes, he has made more friends by his stand than he has lost," observed Alan, with unnatural diffidence. "I shouldn't let that worry me a minute, Mrs. Blackburn. David is a big man, and his influence grows every hour. The young blood is flowing toward him."

"Oh, but don't you see that this hurts me most of all?" responded Angelica. "I wouldn't for the world say this outside, but you are David's friend and almost one of the family, and I know you will understand me."

She lifted her eyes to his face—those large, shining eyes as soft as a dove's breast—and after a moment in which he gazed at her without speaking, Alan answered gently, "Yes, I understand you."

"It would grieve me if you didn't because I feel that I can trust you."

"Yes, you can trust me—absolutely." He looked at Mary as he spoke, and she smiled back at him with serene and joyous confidence.

"That is just what I tell Mary," resumed Angelica. "You are so trustworthy that it is a comfort to talk to you, and then we both feel, don't we, dear?" she inquired turning to the girl, "that your wonderful knowledge of human nature makes your judgment of such value."

Alan laughed, though his eyes sparkled with pleasure. "I don't know about that," he replied, "though

my opinion, whatever it may be worth, is at your service."

"That is why I am speaking so frankly because I feel that you can help me. If you could only make David see his mistake—if you could only persuade him to give up this idea. It can't be right to overturn all the sacred things of the past—to discredit the principles we Virginians have believed in for fifty years. Surely you agree with me that it is a deplorable error of judgment?"

As she became more flattering and appealing, Alan recovered his gay insouciance. "If you want a candid answer, Mrs. Blackburn," he replied gallantly, "there isn't an ambition, much less a principle on earth, for which I would disagree with you."

Angelica smiled archly, and she was always at her loveliest when her face was illumined by the glow and colour of her smile. Was it possible, Caroline wondered while she watched her, that so simple a thing as the play of expression—as the parting of the lips, the raising of the eyebrows—could make a face look as if the light of heaven had fallen over it?

"If you get impertinent, I'll make Mary punish you!" exclaimed Angelica reproachfully; and a minute later the car passed on, while she playfully shook her finger from the window.

"How very handsome he is," said Caroline as she looked back in the lane. "I didn't know that a man could be so good-looking."

Angelica was settling herself comfortably under the robe. "Yes, he is quite unusual," she returned, and added after a pause, "If his uncle ever dies, and they say he is getting very feeble, Alan will inherit one of the largest fortunes in Chicago."

"I'm so glad. That's nice for Miss Blackburn."

"It's nice for Mary—yes." Her tone rather than her words, which were merely conventional, made Caroline glance at her quickly; but Angelica's features were like some faultless ivory mask. For the first time it struck the girl that even a beautiful face could appear vacant in repose.

"Where are we going now, mother?" asked Letty, who had been good and quiet during the long wait in the lane.

"To the Ridleys', dear. I've brought a basket." There was a moment's delay while she gave a few directions to the footman, and then, as Letty snuggled closely against Caroline's arm, the car went on rapidly toward the city.

The Ridleys lived in a small frame house in Pine Street; and when the car stopped before the door, where a number of freshly washed children were skipping rope on the pavement, Angelica alighted and held out her hand to Letty.

"Do you want to come in with me, Letty?"

"I'd rather watch these children skip, mother. Miss Meade, may I have a skipping-rope?"

Behind them the footman stood waiting with a covered basket, and for an instant, while Mrs. Blackburn looked down on it, a shadow of irritation rippled across her face. "Take that up to the second floor, John, and ask Mrs. Ridley if she got the yarn I sent for the socks?" Then, changing her mind as John disappeared into the narrow hall, from which a smell of cabbage floated, she added firmly, "We won't stay a minute, Letty, but you and Miss Meade must come up with me. I always feel," she explained to

Caroline, "that it does the child good to visit the poor, and contrast her own lot with that of others. Young minds are so impressionable, and we never know when the turning-point comes in a life." Grasping Letty's hand she stepped over the skipping-rope, which the children had lowered in awe to the pavement.

"Letty has a cold. I'm afraid she oughtn't to go in," said Caroline hastily, while the child, rescued in the last extremity, threw a grateful glance at her.

"You really think so? Well, perhaps next time. Ah, there is Mr. Ridley now! We can speak to him without seeing his wife to-day." Instinctively, before she realized the significance of her action, she had drawn slightly aside.

A tall man, with a blotched, irascible face and a wad of tobacco in his mouth, lurched out on the porch, and stopped short at the sight of his visitors. He appeared surly and unattractive, and in her first revulsion, Caroline was conscious of a sudden sympathy with Blackburn's point of view. "He may be right, after all," she admitted to herself. "Kind as Mrs. Blackburn is, she evidently doesn't know much about people. I suppose I shouldn't have known anything either if I hadn't been through the hospital."

"I am glad to see you down, Mr. Ridley," said Angelica graciously. "I hope you are quite well again and that you have found the right kind of work."

"Yes, 'm, I'm well, all right, but there ain't much doing now except down at the works, and you know the way Mr. Blackburn treats me whenever I go down there." He was making an effort to be ingratiating, and while he talked his appearance seemed to change and grow less repelling. The surliness left his face, his

figure straightened from the lurching walk, and he even looked a shade cleaner. "It is wonderful the power she has over people," reflected the girl. "I suppose it comes just from being so kind and lovely."

"You mustn't give up hope," Mrs. Blackburn replied encouragingly. "We never know at what moment some good thing may turn up. It is a pity there isn't more work of the kind in Richmond."

"Well, you see, ma'am, Mr. Blackburn has cornered the whole lot. That's the way capital treats labour whenever it gets the chance." His face assumed an argumentative expression. "To be sure, Mr. Blackburn didn't start so very high himself, but that don't seem to make any difference, and the minute a man gets to the top, he tries to stop everybody else that's below him. If he hadn't had the luck to discover that cheap new way to make steel, I reckon he wouldn't be very far over my head to-day. It was all accident, that's what I tell the men down at the works, and luck ain't nothing but accident when you come to look at it."

Mrs. Blackburn frowned slightly. It was plain that she did not care to diminish the space between Blackburn and his workmen, and Ridley's contemptuous tone was not entirely to her liking. She wanted to stoop, not to stand on a level with the objects of her charity.

"The war abroad has opened so many opportunities," she observed, amiably but vaguely.

"It's shut down a sight more than it's opened," rejoined Ridley, who possessed the advantage of knowing something of what he was talking about. "All the works except the steel and munition plants are laying off men every hour. It's easy enough on men like Mr. Blackburn, but it's hard on us poor ones, and it don't

make it any easier to be sending all of this good stuff out of the country. Let the folks in Europe look after themselves, that's what I say. There are hungry mouths enough right here in this country without raising the price of everything we eat by shipping the crops over the water. I tell you I'll vote for any man, I don't care what he calls himself, who will introduce a bill to stop sending our provisions to the folks over yonder who are fighting when they ought to be working——"

"But surely we must do our best to help the starving women and children of Europe. It wouldn't be human, it wouldn't be Christian——" Angelica paused and threw an appealing glance in the direction of Caroline, who shook her head scornfully and looked away to the children on the pavement. Why did she stoop to argue with the man? Couldn't she see that he was merely the cheapest sort of malcontent?

"The first thing you know we'll be dragged into this here war ourselves," pursued Ridley, rolling the wad of tobacco in his mouth, "and it's the men like Mr. Blackburn that will be doing it. There's a lot of fellows down at the works that talk just as he does, but that's because they think they know which side their bread is buttered on! Some of 'em will tell you the boss is the best friend they have on earth; but they are talking through their hats when they say so. As for me, I reckon I've got my wits about me, and as long as I have they ain't going to make me vote for nobody except the man who puts the full dinner pail before any darn squabble over the water. I ain't got anything against you, ma'am, but Mr. Blackburn ain't treated me white, and if my turn ever comes, I'm going to get even with him as sure as my name is James Ridley."

"I think we'd better go," said Caroline sternly. She had suspected from the first that Ridley had been drinking, and his rambling abuse was beginning to make her angry. It seemed not only foolish, but wicked to make a martyr of such a man.

"Yes, we must go," assented Mrs. Blackburn uneasily. "I won't see Mrs. Ridley to-day," she added. "Tell her to let me know when she has finished the socks, and I will send for them. I am giving her some knitting to do for the War Relief."

"All right, she may do what she pleases as long as she's paid for it," rejoined Ridley with a grin. "I ain't interfering."

Then, as the procession moved to the car, with the footman and the empty basket making a dignified rearguard, he added apologetically, "I hope you won't bear me a grudge for my plain speaking, ma'am?"

"Oh, no, for I am sure you are honest," replied Mrs. Blackburn, with the manner of affable royalty.

At last, to Caroline's inexpressible relief, they drove away amid the eager stares of the children that crowded the long straight street. "I always wonder how they manage to bring up such large families," remarked Angelica as she gazed with distant benignity out of the window. "Oh, I quite forgot. I must speak to Mrs. Macy about some pillow cases. John, we will stop at Mrs. Macy's in the next block."

In a dark back room just beyond the next corner, they found an elderly woman hemstitching yards of fine thread cambric ruffling. As they entered, she pinned the narrow strip of lawn over her knee, and looked up without rising. She had a square, stolid face, which had settled into the heavy placidity that comes to those

who expect nothing. Her thin white hair was parted and brushed back from her sunken temples, and her eyes, between chronically reddened lids, gazed at her visitors with a look of passive endurance. "My hip is bad to-day," she explained. "I hope you won't mind my not getting up." She spoke in a flat, colourless voice, as if she had passed beyond the sphere of life in which either surprises or disappointments are possible. Suffering had moulded her thought into the plastic impersonal substance of philosophy.

"Oh, don't think of moving, Mrs. Macy," returned Angelica kindly. "I stopped by to bring you the lace edging you needed, and to ask if you have finished any of the little pillow slips? Now, that your son is able to get back to work, you ought to have plenty of spare time for hemstitching."

"Yes, there's plenty of time," replied Mrs. Macy, without animation, "but it's slow work, and hard on weak eyes, even with spectacles. You like it done so fine that I have to take twice the trouble with the stitches, and I was just thinking of asking you if you couldn't pay me twenty cents instead of fifteen a yard? It's hard to make out now, with every mouthful you eat getting dearer all the time, and though Tom is a good son, he's got a large family to look after, and his eldest girl has been ailing of late, and had to have the doctor before she could keep on at school."

A queer look had crept into Angelica's face—the prudent and guarded expression of a financier who suspects that he is about to be over-matched, that, if he is not cautious, something will be got from him for nothing. For the instant her features lost their softness, and became sharp and almost ugly, while there flashed through

Caroline's mind the amazing thought, "I believe she is stingy! Yet how could she be when she spends such a fortune on clothes?" Then the cautious look passed as swiftly as it had come, and Mrs. Blackburn stooped over the rocking-chair, and gathered the roll of thread cambric into her gloved hands. "I can have it done anywhere for fifteen cents a yard," she said slowly.

"Well, I know, ma'am, that used to be the price, but they tell me this sort of work is going up like everything else. When you think I used to pay eight and ten cents a pound for middling, and yesterday they asked me twenty-six cents at the store. Flour is getting so high we can barely afford it, and even corn meal gets dearer every day. If the war in Europe goes on, they say there won't be enough food left in America to keep us alive. It ain't that I'm complaining, Mrs. Blackburn, I know it's a hard world on us poor folks, and I ain't saying that anybody's to blame for it, but it did cross my mind, while I was thinking over these things a minute ago, that you might see your way to pay me a little more for the hemstitching."

While she talked she went on patiently turning the hem with her blunted thumb, and as she finished, she raised her head for the first time and gazed stoically, not into Angelica's face, but at a twisted ailantus tree which grew by the board fence of the backyard.

"I am glad you look at things so sensibly, Mrs. Macy," observed Angelica cheerfully. She had dropped the ruffling to the floor, and as she straightened herself, she recovered her poise and amiability. "One hears so many complaints now among working people, and at a time like this, when the country is approaching a crisis, it is so important" —this was a favourite phrase with

her, and she accented it firmly—"it is so important that all classes should stand together and work for the common good. I am sure I try to do my bit. There is scarcely an hour when I am not trying to help, but I do feel that the well-to-do classes should not be expected to make all the sacrifices. The working people must do their part, and with the suffering in Europe, and the great need of money for charities, it doesn't seem quite fair, does it, for you to ask more than you've been getting? It isn't as if fifteen cents a yard wasn't a good price. I can easily get it done elsewhere for that, but I thought you really needed the work."

"I do," said Mrs. Macy, with a kind of dry terror. "It's all I've got to live on."

"Then I'm sure you ought to be thankful to get it and not complain because it isn't exactly what you would like. All of us, Mrs. Macy, have to put up with things that we wish were different. If you would only stop to think of the suffering in Belgium, you would feel grateful instead of dissatisfied with your lot. Why, I can't sleep at night because my mind is so full of the misery in the world."

"I reckon you're right," Mrs. Macy replied humbly, and she appeared completely convinced by the argument. "It's awful enough the wretchedness over there, and Tom and I have tried to help the little we could. We can't give much, but he has left off his pipe for a month in order to send what he spent in tobacco, and I've managed to do some knitting the last thing at night and the first in the morning. I couldn't stint on food because there wasn't any to spare, so I said to myself, 'Well, I reckon there's one thing you can give and that's sleep.' So Mrs. Miller, she lets me have the

yarn, and I manage to go to bed an hour later and get up an hour sooner. When you've got to my age, the thing you can spare best is sleep."

"You're right, and I'm glad you take that rational view." Mrs. Blackburn's manner was kind and considerate. "Every gift is better that includes sacrifice, don't you feel? Tell your son that I think it is fine his giving up tobacco. He has his old place at the works, hasn't he?"

"I wrote straight to Mr. Blackburn, ma'am, and he made the foreman hold it for him. Heaven only knows how we'd have managed but for your husband. He ain't the sort that talks unless he is on the platform, but I don't believe he ever forgets to be just when the chance comes to him. There are some folks that call him a hard man, but Tom says it ain't hardness, but justice, and I reckon Tom knows. Tom says the boss hasn't any use for idlers and drunkards, but he's fair enough to the ones who stand by him and do their work —and all the stuff they are putting in the papers about trouble down at the works ain't anything on earth but a political game."

"Well, we must go," said Mrs. Blackburn, who had been growing visibly restless. On her way to the door she paused for an instant and asked, "Your son is something of a politician himself, isn't he, Mrs. Macy?"

"Yes, 'm, Tom has a good deal to do with the Federation of Labour, and in that way he comes more or less into politics. He has a lot of good hard sense if I do say it, and I reckon there ain't anybody that stands better with the workers than he does."

"Of course he is a Democrat?"

"Well, he always used to be, ma'am, but of late I've

noticed that he seems to be thinking the way Mr. Blackburn does. It wouldn't surprise me if he voted with him when the time came, and the way Tom votes," she added proudly, "a good many others will vote, too. He says just as Mr. Blackburn does that the new times take new leaders—that's one of Tom's sayings—and that both the Democratic and Republican Parties ain't big enough for these days. Tom says they are both hitched tight, like two mules, to the past."

By this time Angelica had reached the door, and as she passed out, with Letty's hand in hers, she glanced back and remarked, "I should think the working people would be grateful to any party that keeps them out of the war."

Mrs. Macy looked up from her needle. "Well, war is bad," she observed shortly, "but I've lived through one, and I ain't saying that I haven't seen things that are worse."

The air was fresh and bracing after the close room, and a little later, as they turned into Franklin Street, Angelica leaned out of the window as if she were drinking deep draughts of sunlight.

"The poor are so unintelligent," she observed when she had drawn in her head again. "They seem never able to think with any connection. The war has been going on for a long time now, and yet they haven't learned that it is any concern of theirs."

Letty had begun coughing, and Caroline drew her closer while she asked anxiously, "Do you think it is wise to take a child into close houses?"

"Well, I meant to stay only a moment, but I thought Mrs. Macy would never stop talking. Do you feel badly, darling? Come closer to mother."

"Oh, no, I'm well," answered the child. "It is just my throat that tickles." Then her tone changed, and as they stopped at the corner of the park, she cried out with pleasure, "Isn't that Uncle Roane over there? Uncle Roane, do you see us?"

A handsome, rather dissipated looking young man, with a mop of curly light hair and insolent blue eyes, glanced round at the call, and came quickly to the car, which waited under the elms by the sidewalk. The street was gay with flying motors, and long bars of sunshine slanted across the grass of the park, where groups of negro nurses gossiped drowsily beside empty perambulators.

"Why, Anna Jeannette!" exclaimed the young man, with genial mockery. "This is a pleasure which I thought your worthy Bluebeard had forbidden me!"

"Get in, and I'll take you for a little drive. This is Miss Meade. You met her that night at Briarlay."

"The angel in the house! I remember." He smiled boldly into Caroline's face. "Well, Letty, I'd like to trade my luck for yours. Look at your poor uncle, and tell me honestly if I am not the one who needs to be nursed. Lend her to me?"

"I can't lend you Miss Meade, Uncle Roane," replied the child seriously, "because she plays with me; but if you really need somebody, I reckon I can let you have Mammy Riah for a little while."

Roane laughed while he bent over and pinched Letty's cheek. That he had a bad reputation, Caroline was aware, and though she was obliged to admit that he looked as if he deserved it, she could not deny that he possessed the peculiar charm which one of the old novels at The Cedars described as "the most dangerous attri-

bute of a rake." "I could never like him, yet I can understand how some women might fall in love with him," she thought.

"No, I decline, with thanks, your generous offer," Roane was saying. "If I cannot be nursed by an angel, I will not be nursed by a witch."

Beneath his insolent, admiring gaze a lovely colour flooded Caroline's cheeks. In the daylight his manner seemed to her more offensive than ever, and her impulsive recognition of his charm was followed by an instantaneous recoil.

"I don't like witches," said Letty. "Do you think Miss Meade is an angel, Uncle Roane?'

"From first impressions," retorted Roane flippantly, "I should say that she might be."

As Caroline turned away indignantly, Angelica leaned over and gently patted her hand. "You mustn't mind him, my dear, that's just Roane's way," she explained.

"But I do mind," replied Caroline, with spirit. "I think he is very impertinent."

"Think anything you please, only think of me," rejoined Roane, with a gallant air.

"You bad boy!" protested Angelica. "Can't you see that Miss Meade is provoked with you?"

"No woman, Anna Jeannette, is provoked by a sincere and humble admiration. Are you ignorant of the feminine heart?"

"If you won't behave yourself, Roane, you must get out of the car. And for heaven's sake, stop calling me by that name!"

"My dear sister, I thought it was yours."

"It is not the one I'm known by." She was clearly annoyed. "By the way, have you got your costume for

the tableaux? You were so outrageous at Mrs. Miller's the other night that if they could find anybody else, I believe that they would refuse to let you take part. Why are you so dreadful, Roane?"

"They require me, not my virtue, sister. Go over the list of young men in your set, and tell me if there is another Saint George of England among them?"

His air of mocking pride was so comic that a smile curved Caroline's lips, while Angelica commented seriously, "Well, you aren't nearly so good-looking as you used to be, and if you go on drinking much longer, you will be a perfect fright."

"How she blights my honourable ambition!" exclaimed Roane to Caroline. "Even the cherished career of a tableau favourite is forbidden me."

"Mother is going to be Peace," said Letty, with her stately manner of making conversation, "and she will look just like an angel. Her dress has come all the way from New York, Uncle Roane, and they sent a wreath of leaves to go on her head. If I don't get sick, Miss Meade is going to take me to see her Friday night."

"Well, if I am brother to Peace, Letty, I must be good. Miss Meade, how do you like Richmond?"

"I love it," answered Caroline, relieved by his abrupt change of tone. "The people are so nice. There is Mrs. Colfax now. Isn't she beautiful?"

They were running into Monument Avenue, and Daisy Colfax had just waved to them from a passing car.

"Yes, I proposed to her twice," replied Roane, gazing after Daisy's rose-coloured veil which streamed gaily behind her. "But she could not see her way, unfortunately, to accept me. I am not sure, between you

and me, that she didn't go farther and fare worse with old Robert. I might have broken her heart, but I should never have bored her. Speaking of Robert, Anna Jeannette, was he really the author of that slashing editorial in the *Free-Press?*"

"Everybody thinks he wrote it, but it doesn't sound a bit like him. Wasn't it dreadful, Roane?"

"Oh, well, nothing is fair in politics, but the plum," he returned. "By the way, is it true about Blackburn's vaulting ambition, or is it just newspaper stuff?"

"Of course I know nothing positively, Roane, for David never talks to me about his affairs; but he seems to get more and more distracted about politics every day that he lives. I shouldn't like to have it repeated, yet I can't help the feeling that there is a great deal of truth in what the article says about his disloyalty to the South."

"Well, I shouldn't lose any sleep over that if I were you. No man ever took a step forward on this earth that he didn't move away from something that the rest of the world thought he ought to have stood by. There isn't much love lost between your husband and me, but it isn't a political difference that divides us. He has the bad taste not to admire my character."

"I know you never feel seriously about these things," said Angelica sadly, "but I always remember how ardently dear father loved the Democratic Party. He used to say that he could forgive a thief sooner than a traitor."

"Great Scott! What is there left to be a traitor to?" demanded Roane, disrespectfully. "A political machine that grinds out jobs isn't a particularly patriotic institution. I am not taking sides with Blackburn,

my dear sister, only I'd be darned before I'd have acted the part of your precious Colfax. It may be good politics, but it's pretty bad sport, I should think. It isn't playing the game."

"I suppose Robert feels that things are really going too far," observed Angelica feebly, for her arguments always moved in a circle. "He believes so strongly, you know, in the necessity of keeping the South solid. Of course he may not really have attacked David," she added quickly. "There are other editors."

"I am sure there is not one bit of truth in that article," said Caroline suddenly, and her voice trembled with resentment. "I know Mr. Blackburn doesn't oppress his men because we've just been talking with the mother of a man who works in his plant. As for the rest, I was listening to him this afternoon, and I believe he is right." Her eyes were glowing as she finished, and her elusive beauty—the beauty of spirit, not of flesh—gave her features the rare and noble grace of a marble Diana. Her earnestness had suddenly lifted her above them. Though she was only a dark, slender woman, with a gallant heart, she seemed to Roane as remote and royal as a goddess. He liked the waving line of hair on her clear forehead, where the light gathered in a benediction; he liked her firm red lips, with their ever-changing play of expression, and he liked above all the lovely lines of her figure, which was at once so strong and so light, so feminine and so spirited. It was the beauty of character, he told himself, and, by Jove, in a woman, he liked character!

"Well, he has a splendid champion, lucky dog!" he exclaimed,with his eyes on her face.

For an instant Caroline wavered as Angelica's gaze,

full of pained surprise, turned toward her; then gathering her courage, she raised her lashes and met Roane's admiring stare with a candid and resolute look.

"No, it is not that," she said, "but I can't bear to see people unjust to any one."

"You are right," ejaculated Roane impulsively, and he added beneath his breath, "By George, I hope you'll stand up for me like that when I am knocked."

CHAPTER X

Other Discoveries

In the morning Letty awoke with a sore throat, and before night she had developed a cold which spent itself in paroxysms of coughing. "Oh, Miss Meade, make me well before Friday," she begged, as Caroline undressed her. "Isn't Friday almost here now?"

"In three days, dear. You must hurry and get over this cold."

"Do you think I am going to be well, Mammy?" They were in the nursery at Letty's bedtime, and Mammy Riah was heating a cup of camphorated oil over the fire.

"You jes' wait twel I git dish yer' red flan'l on yo' chist, en hit's gwinter breck up yo' cough toreckly," replied Mammy Riah reassuringly. "I'se done soused hit right good in dis hot ile."

"I'll do anything you want. I'll swallow it right down if it will make me well."

"Dar ain't nuttin dat'll breck up a cole quick'n hot ile," said the old woman, "lessen hit's a hot w'iskey toddy."

"Well, you can't give her that," interposed Caroline quickly, "if she isn't better in the morning I'm going to send for Doctor Boland. I've done everything I could think of. Now, jump into bed Letty, dear, and let me cover you up warm before I open the window. I am going to sleep on the couch in the corner."

"Hit pears to me like you en Marse David is done gone clean 'stracted 'bout fresh a'r," grumbled Mammy Riah, as she drew a strip of red flannel out of the oil. "Dar ain' nuttin in de worl' de matter wid dis chile but all dis night a'r you's done been lettin' in on 'er w'ile she wuz sleepin'. Huh! I knows jes ez much about night a'r ez enny er yo' reel doctahs, en I ain' got er bit er use fur hit, I ain't. Hit's a woner to me you all ain' done kilt 'er betweenst you, you and Marse David en Miss Angy, 'en yo' reel doctah. Ef'n you ax me, I 'ud let down all dem winders, en stuff up de chinks wid rags twel Letty was peart enuff ter be outer dat baid."

The danger in night air had been a source of contention ever since the first frost of the season, and though science had at last carried its point, Caroline felt that the victory had cost her both the respect and the affection of the old negress.

"I ain' never riz noner my chillun on night a'r," she muttered rebelliously, while she brought the soaked flannel over to Letty's bed.

"I hope it will cure me," said the child eagerly, and she added after a moment in which Mammy Riah zealously applied the oil and covered her with blankets. "Do you think I'd better have all the night air shut out as she says, Miss Meade?"

"No, darling," answered Caroline firmly. "Fresh air will cure you quicker than anything else.'

But, in spite of the camphorated oil and the wide-open windows, Letty was much worse in the morning. Her face was flushed with fever, and she refused her breakfast, when Mammy Riah brought it, because as she said, "everything hurt her." Even her passionate interest in the tableaux had evaporated, and she lay,

inert and speechless, in her little bed, while her eyes followed Caroline wistfully about the room.

"I telephoned for Doctor Boland the first thing," said Caroline to the old woman, "and now I am going to speak to Mrs. Blackburn. Will you sit with Letty while I run down for a cup of coffee?"

"Ef'n I wuz you, I wouldn't wake Miss Angy," replied the negress. "Hit'll mek 'er sick jes ez sho' ez you live. You'd better run along down en speak ter Marse David."

"I'll tell him at breakfast, but oughtn't Letty's mother to know how anxious I am?"

"She's gwine ter know soon enuff," responded Mammy Riah, "but dey don' low none un us ter rouse 'er twell she's hed 'er sleep out. Miss Angy is one er dem nervous sort, en she gits 'stracted moughty easy."

In the dining-room, which was flooded with sunshine, Caroline found the housekeeper and Blackburn, who had apparently finished his breakfast, and was glancing over a newspaper. There was a pile of half-opened letters by his plate, and his face wore the look of animation which she associated with either politics or business.

"I couldn't leave Letty until Mammy Riah came," she explained in an apologetic tone. "Her cold is so much worse that I've telephoned for the doctor."

At this Blackburn folded the paper and pushed back his chair. "How long has she had it?" he inquired anxiously. "I thought she wasn't well yesterday." There was the tender, protecting sound in his voice that always came with the mention of Letty.

"She hasn't been herself for several days, but this

morning she seems suddenly worse. I am afraid it may be pneumonia."

"Have you said anything to Angelica?" asked Mrs. Timberlake, and her tone struck Caroline as strained and non-committal.

"Mammy Riah wouldn't let me wake her. I am going to her room as soon as her bell rings."

"Well, she's awake. I've just sent up her breakfast." The housekeeper spoke briskly. "She has to be in town for some rehearsals."

Blackburn had gone out, and Caroline sat alone at the table while she hastily swallowed a cup of coffee. It was a serene and cloudless day, and the view of the river had never looked so lovely as it did through the falling leaves and over the russet sweep of autumn grasses. October brooded with golden wings over the distance.

"I had noticed that Letty had a sort of hacking cough for three days," said Mrs. Timberlake from the window, "but I didn't think it would amount to anything serious."

"Yes, I tried to cure it, and last night Mammy Riah doctored her. The child is so delicate that the slightest ailment is dangerous. It seems strange that she should be so frail. Mr. Blackburn looks strong, and his wife was always well until recently, wasn't she?"

For a moment Mrs. Timberlake stared through the window at a sparrow which was perched on the topmost branch of a juniper. "I never saw any one hate to have a child as much as Angelica did," she said presently in her dry tones. "She carried on like a crazy woman about it. Some women are like that, you know."

"Yes, I know, but she is devoted to Letty now."

The housekeeper did not reply, and her face grew greyer and harsher than ever.

"No one could be sweeter than she is with her," said Caroline, after a moment in which she tried to pierce mentally the armour of Mrs. Timberlake's reserve. "She isn't always so silent," she thought. "I hear her talking by the hour to Mammy Riah, but it is just as if she were afraid of letting out something if she opened her lips. I wonder if she is really so prejudiced against Mrs. Blackburn that she can't talk of her?" Though Caroline's admiration for Angelica had waned a little on closer acquaintance, she still thought her kind and beautiful, except in her incomprehensible attitude to the old sewing woman in Pine Street. The recollection of that scene, which she had found it impossible to banish entirely, was a sting in her memory; and as she recalled it now, her attitude toward Angelica changed insensibly from that of an advocate to a judge.

"Oh, Angelica is sweet enough," said the housekeeper suddenly, with a rasping sound, as if the words scraped her throat as she uttered them, "if you don't get in her way." Then facing Caroline squarely, she added in the same tone, "I'm not saying anything against Angelica, Miss Meade. Our grandmothers were sisters, and I am not the sort to turn against my own blood kin, but you'll hear a heap of stories about the way things go on in this house, and I want you to take it from me in the beginning that there are a plenty of worse husbands than David Blackburn. He isn't as meek as Moses, but he's been a good friend to me, and if I wanted a helping hand, I reckon I'd go to him now a sight quicker than I would to Angelica, though she's my kin and he isn't."

Rising hurriedly, as she finished, she gave a curt little laugh and exclaimed, "Well, there's one thing David and I have in common. We're both so mortal shut-mouthed because when we once begin to talk, we always let the cat out of the bag. Now, if you're through, you can go straight upstairs and have a word with Angelica before she begins to dress."

She went over to the sideboard, and began counting the silver aloud, while Caroline pushed back her chair, and ran impatiently upstairs to Mrs. Blackburn's room. At her knock the maid, Mary, opened the door, and beyond her Angelica's voice said plaintively, "Oh, Miss Meade, Mary tells me that Letty's cold is very bad. I am so anxious about her."

A breakfast tray was before her, and while she looked down at the china coffee service, which was exquisitely thin and fragile, she broke off a piece of toast, and buttered it carefully, with the precise attention she devoted to the smallest of her personal needs. It seemed to Caroline that she had never appeared so beautiful as she did against the lace pillows, in her little cap and dressing sack of sky-blue silk.

"I came to tell you," said Caroline. "She complains of pain whenever she moves, and I'm afraid, unless something is done at once, it may turn into pneumonia."

"Well, I'm coming immediately, just as soon as I've had my coffee. I woke up with such a headache that I don't dare to stir until I've eaten. You have sent for the doctor, of course?"

"I telephoned very early, but I suppose he won't be here until after his office hours."

Having eaten the piece of toast, Angelica drank her

coffee, and motioned to Mary to remove the tray from her knees. "I'll get up at once," she said. "Mary, give me my slippers. You told me so suddenly that I haven't yet got over the shock."

She looked distressed and frightened, and a little later, when she followed Caroline into the nursery and stooped over Letty's bed, her attitude was that of an early Italian Madonna. The passion of motherhood seemed to pervade her whole yearning body, curving the soft lines to an ineffable beauty.

"Letty, darling, are you better?"

The child opened her eyes and stared, without smiling, in her mother's face.

"Yes, I am better," she answered in a panting voice, "but I wish it didn't hurt so."

"The doctor is coming. He will give you some medicine to cure it."

"Mammy says that it is the night air that makes me sick, but father says that hasn't anything to do with it."

From the fire which she was tending, Mammy Riah looked up moodily. "Huh! I reckon Marse David cyarn' teach me nuttin' 'bout raisin chillun," she muttered under her breath.

"Ask the doctor. He will tell you," answered Angelica. "Do you think it is warm enough in here, Miss Meade?"

"Yes, I am careful about the temperature." Almost unconsciously Caroline had assumed her professional manner, and as she stood there in her white uniform beside Letty's bed, she looked so capable and authoritative that even Mammy Riah was cowed, though she still grumbled in a deep whisper.

'Of course you know best," said Angelica, with the

relief she always felt whenever any one removed a responsibility from her shoulders, or assumed a duty which naturally belonged to her. "Has she fallen asleep so quickly?"

"No, it's stupor. She has a very high fever."

"I don't like that blue look about her mouth, and her breathing is so rapid. Do you think she is seriously ill, Miss Meade?" Angelica had withdrawn from the bed, and as she asked the question, she lowered her voice until her words were almost inaudible. Her eyes were soft and anxious under the drooping lace edge of her cap.

"I don't like her pulse," Caroline also spoke in a whisper, with an anxious glance at the bed, though Letty seemed oblivious of their presence in the room. "I am just getting ready to sponge her with alcohol. That may lower her temperature."

For a moment Mrs. Blackburn wavered between the bed and the door. "I wish I didn't have to go to town," she said nervously. "If it were for anything else except these tableaux I shouldn't think of it. But in a cause like this, when there is so much suffering to be relieved, I feel that one ought not to let personal anxieties interfere. Don't you think I am right, Miss Meade?"

"I haven't thought about it," replied Caroline with her usual directness. "But I am sure you are the best judge of what you ought to do."

"I have the most important part, you see, and if I were to withdraw, it would be such a disappointment to the committee. There isn't any one else they could get at the last moment."

"I suppose not. There is really nothing that you can do here."

"That is what I thought." Angelica's tone was one of relief. "Of course if I were needed about anything it would be different; but you are better able than I am to decide what ought to be done. I always feel so helpless," she added sadly, "when there is illness in the house."

With the relinquishment of responsibility, she appeared to grow almost cheerful. If she had suddenly heard that Letty was much better, or had discovered, after harrowing uncertainty, the best and surest treatment for pneumonia, her face would probably have worn just such a relieved and grateful expression. In one vivid instant, with a single piercing flash of insight, the other woman seemed to look straight through that soft feminine body to Mrs. Blackburn's thin and colourless soul. "I know what she is now—she is thin," said Caroline to herself. "She is thin all through, and I shall never feel the same about her again. She doesn't want trouble, she doesn't want responsibility because it makes her uncomfortable—that is why she turns Letty over to me. She is beautiful, and she is sweet when nothing disturbs her, but I believe she is selfish underneath all that softness and sweetness which costs her so little." And she concluded with a merciless judgment, "That is why she wasn't kind to that poor old woman in Pine Street. It would have cost her something, and she can't bear to pay. She wants to get everything for nothing."

The iron in her soul hardened suddenly, for she knew that this moment of revelation had shattered for her the romance of Briarlay. She might still be fascinated by Mrs. Blackburn; she might still pity her and long to help her; she might still blame Blackburn bitterly

for his hardness—but she could never again wholly sympathize with Angelica.

"There isn't anything in the world that you can do," she repeated gravely.

"I knew you'd say that, and it is so good of you to reassure me." Mrs. Blackburn smiled from the threshold. "Now, I must dress, or I shall be late for the rehearsal. If the doctor comes while I am away, please ask him if he thinks another nurse is necessary. David tells me he telephoned for an extra one for night duty; but, dear Miss Meade, I feel so much better satisfied when I know that Letty is in your charge every minute."

"Oh, she is in my charge. Even if the other nurse comes, I shall still sleep in the room next to her."

"You are so splendid!" For an instant Angelica shone on her from the hall. Then the door closed behind her, and an hour afterwards, as Caroline sat by Letty's bed, with her hand on her pulse, she heard the motor start down the drive and turn rapidly into the lane.

At one o'clock the doctor came, and he was still there a quarter of an hour later, when Mrs. Blackburn rustled, with an anxious face, into the room. She wore a suit of grey cloth, and, with her stole and muff of silver fox, and her soft little hat of grey velvet, she made Caroline think of one of the aspen trees, in a high wind, on the lawn at The Cedars. She was all delicate, quivering gleams of silver, and even her golden hair looked dim and shadowy, under a grey veil, as if it were seen through a mist.

"Oh, Doctor, she isn't really so ill, is she?" Her eyes implored him to spare her, and while she questioned

him, she flung the stole of silver fox away from her throat, as if the weight of the furs oppressed her.

"Well, you mustn't be too anxious. We are doing all we can, you know. In a day or two, I hope, we'll have got her over the worst." He was a young man, the son of Mrs. Colfax's friend, old Doctor Boland, and all his eager youth seemed to start from his eyes while he gazed at Angelica. "Beauty like that is a power," thought Caroline almost resentfully. "It hides everything—even vacancy." All the men she had seen with Mrs. Blackburn, except her husband, had gazed at her with this worshipful and protecting look; and, as she watched it shine now in Doctor Boland's eyes, she wondered cynically why David Blackburn alone should be lacking in this particular kind of chivalry. "He is the only man who looks at her as if she were a human being, not an angel," she reflected. "I wonder if he used to do it once, and if he has stopped because he has seen deeper than any of the others?"

"Then it isn't really pneumonia?" asked Angelica.

He hesitated, still trying to answer the appeal in her eyes, and to spare her the truth if it were possible

"It looks now as if it might be, Mrs. Blackburn, but children pick up so quickly, you know." He reached out his arm as he answered, and led her to the couch in one corner. "Have you some aromatic ammonia at hand, Miss Meade? I think you might give Mrs. Blackburn a few drops of it."

Caroline measured the drops from a bottle on the table by Letty's bed. "Perhaps she had better lie down," she suggested.

"Yes, I think I'll go to my room," answered Angelica, rising from the couch, as she lifted a grateful face to

the young doctor. "A shock always upsets me, and ever since Mary told me how ill Letty was, I have felt as if I couldn't breathe."

She looked really unhappy, and as Caroline met her eyes, she reproached herself for her harsh criticism of the morning. After all, Angelica couldn't help being herself. After all, she wasn't responsible for her limited intelligence and her coldness of nature! Perhaps she felt more in her heart than she was able to express, in spite of her perfect profile and her wonderful eyes. "Even her selfishness may be due to her bringing up, and the way everyone has always spoiled her," pursued the girl, with a swift reaction from her severe judgment.

When Angelica had gone out, Doctor Boland came over to the bed, and stood gazing thoughtfully down on the child, who stirred restlessly and stared up at him with bright, glassy eyes. It was plain to Caroline that he was more disturbed than he had admitted; and his grave young features looked old and drawn while he stood there in silence. He was a thickset man, with an ugly, intelligent face and alert, nearsighted eyes behind enormous glasses with tortoise-shell rims.

"If we can manage to keep her temperature down," he said, and added as if he were pursuing his original train of thought, "Mrs. Blackburn is unusually sensitive."

"She is not very strong."

"For that reason it is better not to alarm her unnecessarily. I suppose Mr. Blackburn can always be reached?"

"Oh, yes, I have his telephone number. He asked me to call him up as soon as I had seen you."

After this he gave a few professional directions, and

left abruptly with the remark, "I'll look in early to-morrow. There is really nothing we can do except keep up the treatment and have as much fresh air as possible in the room. If all goes well, I hope she will have pulled through the worst by Friday—and if I were you," he hesitated and a flush rose to his sandy hair, "I should be careful how I broke any bad news to Mrs. Blackburn."

He went out, closing the door cautiously, as if he feared to make any sound in the house, while Caroline sat down to wonder what it was about Angelica that made every man, even the doctor, so anxious to spare her? "I believe his chief concern about poor Letty is that this illness disturbs her mother," she mused, without understanding. "Well, I hope his prophecy will come true, and that the worst will be over by Friday. If she isn't, it will be a blow to the entertainment committee."

But when Friday came, the child was so much worse that the doctor, when he hurried out before his office hours, looked old and grey with anxiety. At eleven o'clock Blackburn sent his car back to the garage, and came up, with a book which he did not open, to sit in Letty's room. As he entered, Angelica rose from the couch on which she had been lying, and laid her hand on his arm.

"I am so glad you have come, David. It makes me better satisfied to have you in the house."

"I am not going to the works. Mayfield is coming to take down some letters, and I shall be here all day."

"It is a comfort to know that. I couldn't close my eyes last night, so if you are going to be here, I think I'll try to rest a few minutes."

She was pale and tired, and for the first time since she

had been in the house, Caroline discerned a shade of sympathy in the glances they interchanged. "What a beautiful thing it would be if Letty's illness brought them together," she thought, with a wave of happiness in the midst of her apprehension. She had read of men and women who were miraculously ennobled in the crucial moments of life, and her vivid fancy was already weaving a romantic ending to the estrangement of the Blackburns. After all, more improbable things had happened, she told herself in one of her mother's favourite phrases.

At five o'clock, when Doctor Boland came, Blackburn had gone down to his library, and Caroline, who had just slipped into a fresh uniform, was alone in the room. Her eyes were unnaturally large and dark; but she looked cool and composed, and her vitality scarcely felt the strain of the three sleepless nights. Though the second nurse came on duty at six o'clock, Caroline had been too restless and wakeful to stay in her room, and had spent the nights on the couch by the nursery window.

"If we can manage to keep up her strength through the night——"

The doctor had already looked over the chart, and he held it now in his hand while he waited for a response.

"There is a fighting chance, isn't there?"

His face was very grave, though his voice still maintained its professional cheerfulness. "With a child there is always a chance, and if she pulls through the night——"

"I shall keep my eyes on her every minute." As she spoke she moved back to Letty's bed, while the doctor went out with an abrupt nod and the words,

"Mr. Blackburn wishes me to spend the night here. I'll be back after dinner."

The door had hardly closed after him, when it opened again noiselessly, and Mrs. Timberlake thrust her head through the crack. As she peered into the room, with her long sallow face and her look of mutely inviting disaster, there flashed through Caroline's mind the recollection of one of her father's freckled engravings of "Hecuba Gazing Over the Ruins of Troy."

"I've brought you a cup of tea. Couldn't you manage to drink it?"

"Yes, I'd like it." There was something touching in the way Mrs. Timberlake seemed to include her in the distress of the family—to assume that her relation to Letty was not merely the professional one of a nurse to a patient.

Stepping cautiously, as if she were in reality treading on ruins, the housekeeper crossed the room and placed the tray on the table at the bedside. While she leaned over to pour out the tea, she murmured in a rasping whisper, "Mammy Riah is crying so I wouldn't let her come in. Can Letty hear us?"

"No, she is in a stupor. She has been moaning a good deal, but she is too weak to keep it up. I've just given her some medicine."

Her gaze went back to the child, who stirred and gave a short panting sob. In her small transparent face, which was flushed with fever, the blue circle about the mouth seemed to start out suddenly like the mark of a blow. She lay very straight and slim under the cover, as if she had shrunken to half her size since her illness, and her soft, fine hair, drawn smoothly back from her waxen forehead, clung as flat and close as a cap.

"I'd scarcely know her," murmured the housekeeper, with a catch in her throat.

"If she passes the crisis she will pick up quickly. I've seen children as ill as this who were playing about the room a few days afterwards." Caroline tried to speak brightly, but in spite of her efforts, there was a note of awe in her voice.

"Is it really as grave as we fear, Miss Meade?"

Caroline met the question frankly. "It is very grave, Mrs. Timberlake, but with a child, as the doctor told me a minute ago, there is always hope of a sudden change for the better."

"Have you said anything to Angelica?"

"She was in here a little while ago, just before the doctor's visit, but I tried not to alarm her. She is so easily made ill."

The windows were wide open, and Mrs. Timberlake went over to the nearest one, and stood gazing out on the lawn and the half-bared elms. A light wind was blowing, and while she stood there, she shivered and drew the knitted purple cape she wore closer about her shoulders. Beyond the interlacing boughs the sunlight streamed in a golden shower on the grass, which was still bright and green, and now and then a few sparkling drops were scattered through the broad windows, and rippled over the blanket on Letty's bed. "It is hard to get used to these new-fangled ways," observed the housekeeper presently as she moved back to the fire. "In my days we'd have thought a hot room and plenty of whiskey toddy the best things for pneumonia."

"The doctor told me to keep the windows wide open."

"I heard him say so, but don't you think you had better put on a wrap? It feels chilly."

"Oh, no, I'm quite warm." Caroline finished the cup of tea as she spoke and gave back the tray. "That did me good. I needed it."

"I thought so." From the tone in which the words were uttered Caroline understood that the housekeeper was gaining time. "Are you sure you oughtn't to say something to Angelica?"

"Say something? You mean tell her how ill Letty is? Why, the doctor gave me my instructions. He said positively that I was not to alarm Mrs. Blackburn."

"I don't think he understood. He doesn't know that she still expects to be in the tableaux to-night."

For an instant Caroline stared back at her without a word; then she said in an incredulous whisper, "Oh, she wouldn't—she couldn't!"

"She feels it to be her duty—her sacred duty, she has just told me so. You see, I don't think she in the least realizes. She seems confident that Letty is better."

"How can she be? She was in here less than an hour ago."

"And she said nothing about to-night?"

"Not a word. I had forgotten about the tableaux, but, of course, I shouldn't have mentioned them. I tried to be cheerful, to keep up her spirit—but she must have seen. She couldn't help seeing."

The housekeeper's lips twitched, and she moistened them nervously. "If you knew Angelica as well as I do," she answered flatly, "you'd realize that she can help seeing anything on earth except the thing she wants to see."

"Then you must tell her," rejoined Caroline positively. "Someone must tell her."

"I couldn't." Mrs. Timberlake was as emphatic

as Caroline. "And what's more she wouldn't believe me if I did. She'd pretend it was some of my crankiness. You just wait till you try to convince Angelica of something she doesn't want to believe."

"I'll tell her if you think I ought to—or perhaps it would be better to go straight to Mr. Blackburn?"

Mrs. Timberlake coughed. "Well, I reckon if anybody can convince her, David can," she retorted. "He doesn't mince matters."

"The night nurse comes on at six o'clock, and just as soon as she gets here I'll go downstairs to Mr. Blackburn. That will be time enough, won't it?"

"Oh, yes, she isn't going until half-past seven. I came to you because I heard her order the car."

When she had gone Caroline turned back to her watch; but her heart was beating so rapidly that for a moment she confused it with Letty's feverish breathing. She reproached herself bitterly for not speaking frankly to Mrs. Blackburn, for trying to spare her; and yet, recalling the last interview, she scarcely knew what she could have said. "It seemed too cruel to tell her that Letty might not live through the night," she thought. "It seemed too cruel—but wasn't that just what Mrs. Timberlake meant when she said that Mr. Blackburn 'wouldn't mince matters?'"

The night nurse was five minutes late, and during these minutes, the suspense, the responsibility, became almost unbearable. It was as if the whole burden of Angelica's ignorance, of her apparent heartlessness, rested on Caroline's shoulders. "If she had gone I could never have forgiven myself," she was thinking when Miss Webster, the nurse, entered with her brisk, ingratiating manner.

"I stopped to speak to Mrs. Blackburn," she explained. "She tells me Letty is better." Her fine plain face, from which a wealth of burnished red hair was brushed severely back, beamed with interest and sympathy. Though she had been nursing private cases for ten years, she had not lost the energy and enthusiasm of a pupil nurse in the hospital. Her tall, erect figure, with its tightly confined hips, bent back, like a steel spring, whenever she stooped over the child.

Caroline shook her head without replying, for Letty had opened her eyes and was gazing vacantly at the ceiling. "Do you want anything, darling? Miss Webster is going to sit with you a minute while I run downstairs to speak to father."

But the child had closed her eyes again, and it was impossible to tell whether or not the words had penetrated the stupor in which she had been lying for the last two or three hours. A few moments later, as Caroline descended the staircase and crossed the hall to Blackburn's library, the memory of Letty's look floated between her and the object of her errand. "If Mrs. Blackburn could see that she would know," she told herself while she raised her hand to the panel of the door. "She couldn't help knowing."

At the knock Blackburn called to her to enter, and when she pushed the door open and crossed the threshold, she saw that he was standing by the window, looking out at the afterglow. Beyond the terrace and the dark spires of the junipers, the autumn fields were changing from brown to purple under the flower-like pink of the sky. Somewhere in the distance one of the Airedale terriers was whining softly.

As soon as he caught sight of her, Blackburn crossed

the floor with a rapid stride, and stood waiting for her to speak. Though he did not open his lips, she saw his face grow white, and the corners of his mouth contract suddenly as if a tight cord were drawn. For the first time she noticed that he had a way of narrowing his eyes when he stared fixedly.

"There hasn't been any change, Mr. Blackburn. I wish to speak to you about something else."

From the sharp breath that he drew, she could measure the unutterable relief that swept over him.

"You say there hasn't been any change?"

"Not since morning. She is, of course, very ill, but with a child," she had repeated the phrase so often that it seemed to have lost its meaning, "the crisis sometimes comes very quickly. If we can manage to keep up her strength for the next twenty-four hours, I believe the worst will be over."

His figure, as he stood there in the dim light, was impressed with a new vividness on her mind, and it was as he looked at this moment that she always remembered him.

"Do you wish anything?" he asked. "Is everything being done that is possible?"

"Everything. The doctor is coming to spend the night, and I shall sit up with Miss Webster."

"But don't you need rest? Can you go without sleep and not lose your strength?"

She shook her head. "I couldn't sleep until she is better."

A look of gratitude leaped to his eyes, and she became aware, through some subtle wave of perception, that for the first time, she had assumed a definite image in his thoughts.

"Thank you," he answered simply, but his tone was full of suppressed feeling.

While he looked at her the old prejudice, the old suspicion and resentment faded from her face, and she gazed back at him with trusting and friendly eyes. Though she was pale and tired, and there were lines of worry and sleeplessness in her forehead, she appeared to him the incarnation of helpfulness. The spirit of goodness and gentleness shone in her smile, and ennobled her slight womanly figure, which drooped a little in its trim uniform. She looked as if she would fight to the death, would wear herself to a shadow, for any one she loved, or for any cause in which she believed.

"I came to ask you," she said very quietly, "if it would not be better to tell Mrs. Blackburn the truth about Letty?"

He started in amazement. "But she knows, doesn't she?"

"She doesn't know everything. She thinks Letty is better. Miss Webster has been talking to her."

"And you think she ought to be warned?"

Her question had evidently puzzled him.

"I think it is unfair to leave her in ignorance. She does not in the least realize Letty's condition. Mrs. Timberlake tells me she heard her order the car for half-past seven."

"Order the car?" He seemed to be groping through a fog of uncertainty. If only heaven had granted intuition to men, thought Caroline impatiently, how much time might be saved!

"To go to the tableaux. You know the tableaux are to-night."

"Yes, I had forgotten." His tone changed and grew positive. "Of course she must be told. I will tell her."

"That is all." She turned away as she spoke, and laid her hand on the knob of the door. "Mrs. Timberlake and I both felt that I ought to speak to you."

"I am glad you did." He had opened the door for her, and following her a step or two into the hall, he added gratefully, "I can never thank you enough."

Without replying, she hurried to the staircase, and ran up the steps to the second storey. When she reached the door of the nursery, she glanced round before entering, and saw that Blackburn had already come upstairs and was on his way to Angelica's room. While she watched, she saw him knock, and then open the door and cross the threshold with his rapid step.

Miss Webster was sitting by Letty's bed, and after a look at the child, Caroline threw herself on the couch and closed her eyes in the hope that she might fall asleep. Though she was profoundly relieved by her conversation with Blackburn, she was still anxious about Angelica, and impatient to hear how she had borne the shock. As the time dragged on, with the interminable passage of the minutes in a sickroom, she found it impossible to lie there in silence any longer, and rising from the couch, she glanced at the clock before going to her room to wash her hands and straighten her hair for dinner. It was exactly half-past seven, and a few minutes later, when she had finished her simple preparations, and was passing the window on her way to the hall, she heard the sound of a motor in the circular drive. "I suppose they forgot to tell John," she thought, "or can it be the doctor so soon?"

The hall was empty when she entered it; but before

she had reached the head of the stairs, a door opened and shut in the left wing, and the housekeeper joined her. At the bend in the staircase, beneath a copy of the Sistine Madonna, which had been crowded out of the drawing-room, the elder woman stopped and laid a detaining hand on Caroline's arm. Even through the starched sleeve her grasp felt dry and feverish.

"Miss Meade, did you get a chance to speak to David?"

"Why, yes, I spoke to him. I went straight down as soon as Miss Webster came on duty."

"Did he say he would tell Angelica?"

"He came up at once to tell her. I saw him go into her room."

Mrs. Timberlake glanced helplessly up at the Sistine Madonna. "Well, I don't know what he could have said," she answered, "for Angelica has gone. That was her motor you heard leaving the door."

CHAPTER XI

The Sacred Cult

When Caroline looked back upon it afterwards, she remembered that dinner as the most depressing meal of her life. While she ate her food, with the dutiful determination of the trained nurse who realizes that she is obliged to keep up her strength, her gaze wandered for diversion to the soft blues and pinks on the wall. The tapestries were so fresh that she wondered if they were modern. More than ever the airy figure of Spring, floating in primrose-coloured draperies through a flowery grove, reminded her of Angelica. There was the same beauty of line, the same look of sweetness and grace, the same amber hair softly parted under a wreath of pale grey-green leaves. The very vagueness of the features, which left all except the pensive outline to the imagination, seemed to increase rather than diminish this resemblance.

"Have you ever noticed how much that figure is like Mrs. Blackburn?" she asked, turning to the housekeeper, for the silence was beginning to embarrass her. Mary was away and neither Blackburn nor Mrs. Timberlake had uttered a word during the four short courses, which Patrick served as noiselessly as if he were eluding an enemy.

Mrs. Timberlake lifted her eyes to the wall. "Yes, it's the living image of her, if you stand far enough off. I reckon that's why she bought it."

Blackburn, who was helping himself to coffee, glanced up to remark, "I forgot to take sugar, Patrick," and when the tray was brought back, he selected a lump of sugar and broke it evenly in half. If he had heard the question, there was no hint of it in his manner.

Having finished a pear she had been forcing herself to eat, Caroline looked inquiringly from Blackburn to Mrs. Timberlake. If only somebody would speak! If only Mary, with her breezy chatter, would suddenly return from New York! From a long mirror over the sideboard Caroline's reflection, very pale, very grave, stared back at her like a face seen in a fog. "I look like a ghost," she thought. "No wonder they won't speak to me. After all, they are silent because they can think of nothing to say." Unlike in everything else, it occurred to her that Blackburn and the housekeeper had acquired, through dissimilar experiences, the same relentless sincerity of mind. They might be blunt, but they were undeniably honest; and contrasted with the false values and the useless accessories of the house, this honesty impressed her as entirely admirable. The brooding anxiety in Blackburn's face did not change even when he smiled at her, and then rose and stood waiting while she passed before him out of the dining-room. It wasn't, she realized, that he was deliberately inconsiderate or careless in manner; it was merely that the idea of pretending had never occurred to him. The thought was in her mind, when he spoke her name abruptly, and she turned to find that he had followed her to the staircase.

"Miss Meade, I have to see a man on business for a half hour. I shall be in the library. If there is any change, will you send for me?"

She bowed. "Yes, I shall be with Letty all the time."

"As soon as Baker goes, I'll come up. I asked the doctor to spend the night."

"He said he couldn't get here before ten or eleven, but to telephone if we needed him," broke in Mrs. Timberlake. "Mammy Riah has gone to the nursery, Miss Meade. Is there any reason why she shouldn't stay?"

"None in the world." As Caroline turned away and ascended the stairs, she remembered that there had been no question of Angelica. "I wish I could understand. I wish I knew what it means," she said to herself in perplexity. She felt smothered by the uncertainty, the coldness, the reserve of the people about her. Everybody seemed to speak with tight lips, as if in fear lest something might escape that would help to clear away the obscurity. It was all so different from The Cedars, where every thought, every joy, every grief, was lived in a common centre of experience.

When she opened the nursery door, Mammy Riah glanced up from the fire, where she was crouching over the low fender. "I'se mortal feared, honey," she muttered, while she held out her wrinkled palms to the blaze. She had flung a shawl of crimson wool over her shoulders, and the splash of barbaric colour, with her high Indian cheek bones and the low crooning sound of her voice, gave her a resemblance to some Oriental crooked image of Destiny. As the wind rocked the elms on the lawn, she shivered, and rolled her glittering eyes in the direction of Letty's bed.

"Don't give up, Mammy Riah," said Caroline consolingly. "You have nursed children through worse illnesses than this."

"Yas'm, I know I is, but dar wan' noner dese yer signs dat I see now." The flames leaped up suddenly, illuminating her stooping figure in the brilliant shawl with an intense and sinister glow. "I ain't sayin' nuttin'. Naw'm, I ain' lettin' on dat I'se seen whut I'se seen; but dar's somebody done thowed a spell on dis place jes ez sho' ez you live. Dar wuz a ring out yonder on de grass de fust thing dis mawnin', en de fros' ain' never so much ez teched it. Naw, honey, de fros' hit ain' never come a nigh hit. Patrick he seed hit, too, but he ain' let on nuttin' about hit needer, dough de misery is done cotched him in bofe er his feet."

"You don't really think we're conjured, Mammy?"

Mammy Riah cast a secretive glance over her shoulder, and the dramatic instinct of her race awoke in every fibre of her body as she made a vague, mournful gesture over the ashes. "I 'members, honey, I 'members," she muttered ominously. Though Caroline had been familiar with such superstitions from infancy, there was a vividness in these mysteries and invocations which excited her imagination. She knew, as she assured herself, that there "wasn't anything in it"; yet, in spite of her reason, the image of the old woman muttering her incantations over the fire, haunted her like a prophetic vision of evil.

Turning away she went over to Letty's bed, and laid her small, cool fingers on the child's pulse.

"Has there been any change?"

Miss Webster shook her head. "She hasn't stirred."

"I don't like her pulse."

"It seemed a little stronger after the last medicine, but it was getting more rapid a minute ago. That old woman has been talking a lot of heathen nonsense," she

added in a whisper. "She says she found a conjure ball at the front door this morning. I am from the Middle West, and it sounds dreadfully uncanny to me."

"I know. She thinks we are conjured. That's just their way. Don't notice her."

"Well, I hope she isn't going to sit up all night with me." Then, as Mammy Riah glanced suspiciously round, and began shaking her head until the shadows danced like witches, Miss Webster added in a more distinct tone, "Is Mrs. Blackburn still hopeful? She is so sweet that I've quite lost my heart to her."

"She wasn't at dinner," answered Caroline, and going back to the fire, she sat down in a chintz-covered chair, with deep arms, and shaded her eyes from the flames. In some incomprehensible way Mammy Riah and Blackburn and Angelica, all seemed to hover in spirit round the glowing hearth.

She was still sitting there, and her hand had not dropped from her eyes, when Blackburn came in and crossed the floor to a chair at the foot of Letty's bed. After a whispered word or two with Miss Webster, he opened a book he had brought with him, and held it under the night lamp on the candle-stand. When a quarter of an hour had passed Caroline noticed that he had not turned a page, and that he appeared to be reading and re-reading the same paragraph, with the dogged determination which was his general attitude toward adversity. His face was worn and lined, and there were heavy shadows under his eyes; but he gave her still the impression of a man who could not be conquered by events. "There is something in him, some vein of iron, that you can't break, you can't even bend," she thought. She remembered that her father had once told her that

after the worst had happened you began to take things easier; and this casual recollection seemed to give her a fresh understanding of Blackburn. "Father knew life," she thought, "I wonder what he would have seen in all this? I wonder how he would have liked Mr. Blackburn and his political theories?" The profile outlined darkly against the shade of the night lamp, held her gaze in spite of the effort she made, now and then, to avert it. It was a strong face, and seen in this light, with the guard of coldness dropped, it was a noble one. Thought and feeling and idealism were there, and the serenity, not of the philosopher, but of the soldier. He had fought hard, she saw, and some deep instinct told her that he had conquered. A phrase read somewhere long ago returned to her as clearly as if it were spoken aloud. "He had triumphed over himself." That was the meaning of his look. That was the thought for which she had been groping. He had triumphed over himself.

She started up quickly, and ran with noiseless steps to the bed, for Letty had opened her eyes and cried out.

"Is she awake?" asked Blackburn, and closing his book, he moved nearer.

Caroline's hand was on Letty's pulse, and she replied without looking at him, "She is getting restless. Miss Webster, is it time for the medicine?"

"It is not quite half-past ten. That must be the doctor now at the door."

Rising hurriedly, Blackburn went out into the hall, and when he came back, Doctor Boland was with him. As Caroline left the bedside and went to the chair by the fire, she heard Blackburn ask sharply, "What does the change mean, doctor?" and Doctor Boland's sooth-

ing response, "Wait a while. Wait a while." Then he stooped to make an examination, while Miss Webster prepared a stimulant, and Letty moaned aloud as if she were frightened. A clock outside was just striking eleven when the doctor said in a subdued tone, too low to be natural, yet too clear to be a whisper, "Her pulse is getting weaker." He bent over the bed, and as Caroline stood up, she saw Letty's face as if it were in a dream—the flat, soft hair, the waxen forehead, the hard, bright eyes, and the bluish circle about the small, quivering mouth. Then she crossed the floor like a white shadow, and in a little while the room sank back into stillness. Only the dropping of the ashes, and the low crooning of Mammy Riah, disturbed the almost unendurable silence.

For the first hour, while she sat there, Caroline felt that the discipline of her training had deserted her, and that she wanted to scream. Then gradually the stillness absorbed her, and there swept over her in waves a curious feeling of lightness and buoyancy, as if her mind had detached itself from her body, and had become a part of the very pulse and rhythm of the life that surrounded her. She had always lived vividly, with the complete reaction to the moment of a vital and sensitive nature; and she became aware presently that her senses were responsive to every external impression of the room and the night. She heard the wind in the elms, the whispering of the flames, the muttering of Mammy Riah, the short, fretful moans that came from Letty's bed; and all these things seemed a part, not of the world outside, but of her own inner consciousness. Even the few pale stars shining through the window, and the brooding look of the room, with its flickering

firelight and its motionless figures, appeared thin and unsubstantial as if they possessed no objective reality. And out of this vagueness and evanescence of the things that surrounded her, there stole over her a certainty, as wild and untenable as a superstition of Mammy Riah's, that there was a meaning in the smallest incident of the night, and that she was approaching one of the cross-roads of life.

A coal dropped on the hearth; she looked up with a start, and found Blackburn's eyes upon her. "Miss Meade, have you the time? My watch has run down."

She glanced at the little clock on the mantelpiece. "It is exactly one o'clock."

"Thank you." His gaze passed away from her, and she leaned back in her chair, while the sense of strangeness and unreality vanished as quickly as it had come. The old negress was mending the fire with kindling wood, and every now and then she paused and shook her head darkly at the flames. "I ain' sayin' nuttin', but I knows, honey," she repeated.

"Hadn't you better go to bed, Mammy Riah?" asked Caroline pityingly.

"Naw'm, I 'ouldn't better git to baid. I'se got ter watch."

"There isn't anything that you can do, and I'll call you, if there is a change."

But the old woman shook her head stubbornly. "I'se got ter watch, honey," she replied. "Dat's one er dem ole squitch-owls out dar now. Ain't he hollerin' jes like he knows sump'n?"

Her mind was plainly wandering, and seeing that persuasion was useless, Caroline left her to her crooning grief, and went over to Letty's bed. As she passed the

door, it opened without sound, as if it were pushed by a ghost, and Mrs. Timberlake looked in with the question, "Is she any better, doctor?"

The doctor raised his head and glanced round at her. "She is no better," he answered. "Her pulse gets worse all the time."

Unconsciously, while they spoke, they had drawn together around Letty's bed, and stooping over, Caroline listened, with a rapidly beating heart, to the child's breathing. Then, dropping on her knees, she laid her arms about the pillow, as if she would hold the fragile little body to life with all her strength.

She was kneeling there, it seemed to her hours later, when the door swung wide on its hinges, and Angelica, in her white robes, with the wreath of leaves on her hair, paused on the threshold like some Luca della Robbia angel. Her golden hair made a light on her temples; her eyes were deep and starry with triumph; and a glow hung about her that was like the rosy incandescence of the stage. For a minute she stood there; then, flushed, crowned, radiant, she swept into the room.

Blackburn had not lifted his head; there was no sign in his stooping figure that he heard her when she cried out.

"Is Letty really so ill? Is she worse, Doctor Boland?"

The doctor moved a step from the bed, and reached out a protecting hand. "She has been getting weaker."

"I'd sit down and wait, if I were you, Angelica," said Mrs. Timberlake, pushing forward a chair. "There isn't anything else that you can do now."

But, without noticing her, Angelica had dropped to

her knees at Caroline's side. A cry that was half a sob burst from her lips, and lifting her head, she demanded with passionate reproach and regret, "Why did nobody tell me? Oh, why did he let me go?" The words seemed driven from her against her will, and when she had uttered them, she fell forward across the foot of the bed, with her bare arms outstretched before her.

The doctor bent over her, and instinctively, as he did so, he glanced up at Blackburn, who stood, white and silent, looking down on his wife with inscrutable eyes. He uttered no word of defence, he made no movement to help her, and Caroline felt suddenly that the sympathy around him had rushed back like an eddying wave to Angelica. "If he would only speak, if he would only defend himself," she thought almost angrily. Without turning, she knew that Angelica was led to the couch by the window, and she heard Mrs. Timberlake say in unemotional tones, "I reckon we'd better give her a dose of ammonia."

The voices were silent, and except for Mrs. Blackburn's sobs and Letty's rapid breathing, there was no sound in the room. Suddenly from somewhere outside there floated the plaintive whining of the dog that Caroline had heard in the afternoon. "He must be missing Mary," she found herself thinking, while Mammy Riah murmured uneasily from the hearth, "Hit's a bad sign, w'en a dawg howls in de daid er night."

The hours dragged on like eternity, and without moving, without stirring or lifting her eyes, Caroline knelt there, pouring her strength into the life of the unconscious child. Every thought, every feeling, every throbbing nerve, was concentrated upon this solitary consuming purpose—"Letty must live." Science had

done all it could; it remained now for hope and courage to fight the losing fight to the end. "I will never give up," she said sternly under her breath, "I will never give up." If hope and courage could save, if it were possible for the human will to snatch the victory from death, she felt, deep down in the passionate depths of her heart, that, while she watched over her, Letty could not die.

And then gradually, while she prayed, a change as light as a shadow stole over the face of the child. The little features grew less waxen, the glittering eyes melted to a dewy warmth, and it seemed that the blue circles faded slowly, and even the close brown hair looked less dull and lifeless. As the minutes passed, Caroline held her breath in torture, lest the faintest sound, the slightest movement, might check the invisible beneficent current.

At last, when the change had come, she rose from her knees, and with her hand on Letty's pulse, looked up at Blackburn.

"The crisis is past. Her hand is moist, and her pulse is better," she said.

He started up, and meeting her joyous eyes, stood for an instant perfectly motionless, with his gaze on her face. "Thank God!" he exclaimed in a whisper.

As he turned away and went out of the door, Caroline glanced over her shoulder, and saw that there was a glimmer of dawn at the window.

CHAPTER XII

The World's View of an Unfortunate Marriage

On a cloudy morning in December, Caroline ran against Daisy Colfax as she came out of a milliner's shop in Broad Street.

"Oh, Miss Meade, I've been dying to see you and hear news of Letty!" exclaimed the young woman in her vivacious manner. She was wearing a hat of royal purple, with a sweeping wing which intensified the brilliant dusk of her hair and eyes.

"She is quite well again, though of course we are very careful. I came in to look for some small artificial flowers for a doll's hat. We are dressing a doll."

"It must have been a dreadful strain, and Cousin Matty Timberlake told mother she didn't know what they would have done without you. I think it is wonderful the way you keep looking so well."

"Oh, the work is easy," responded Caroline gravely.

"I am sure you are a perfect blessing to them all, especially to poor Angelica," pursued Daisy, in her rippling, shallow voice. Then, in the very centre of the crowded street, regardless of the pedestrians streaming by on either side of her, she added on a higher note: "Have you heard what everybody is saying about the way David Blackburn behaved? Robert insists he doesn't believe a word of it; but then Robert never believes anything except the Bible, so I told him I was going to ask you the very first chance I got.

There isn't a bit of use trying to find out anything from Cousin Matty Timberlake because she is so awfully close-mouthed, and I said to Robert only this morning that I was perfectly sure you would understand why I wanted to know. It isn't just gossip. I am not repeating a thing that I oughtn't to; but the stories are all over town, and if they aren't true, I want to be in a position to deny them."

"What are the stories?" asked Caroline, and she continued immediately, before she was submerged again in the bubbling stream of Daisy's narrative, "Of course it isn't likely that I can help you. This is the first time I have been in town since Letty's illness."

"But that is exactly why you ought to know." As Daisy leaned nearer her purple wing brushed Caroline's face. "It is all over Richmond, Miss Meade," her voice rang out with fluting sweetness, "that David Blackburn kept Letty's condition from Angelica because he was so crazy about her being in those tableaux. They say he simply *made* her go, and that she never knew the child was in danger until she got back in the night. Mrs. Mallow declares she heard it straight from an intimate friend of the family, and somebody, who asked me not to mention her name, told me she knew positively that Doctor Boland hadn't any use in the world for David Blackburn. She said, of course, he hadn't said anything outright, but she could tell just by the way he looked. Everybody is talking about it, and I said to Robert at breakfast that I knew you could tell exactly what happened because we heard from Cousin Matty that you never left Letty's room."

"But why should Mr. Blackburn have wanted her to go? Why should he care?" Though Daisy's sprightly

story had confused her a little, Caroline gathered vaguely that somebody had been talking too much, and she resolved that she would not contribute a single word to the gossip.

"Oh, he has always been wild about Angelica's being admired. Don't you remember hearing her say at that committee meeting at Briarlay that her husband liked her to take part in public affairs? I happen to know that he has almost forced her to go into things time and again when Doctor Boland has tried to restrain her. Mother thinks that is really why he married Angelica, because he was so ambitious, and he believed her beauty and charm would help him in the world. I suppose it must have been a blow to him to find that she couldn't tolerate his views—for she is the most loyal soul on earth—and there are a great many people who think that he voted with the Republicans in the hope of an office, and that he got mad when he didn't get one and turned Independent——"

The flood of words was checked for a moment, while the chauffeur came to ask for a direction, and in the pause Caroline remarked crisply, "I don't believe one word—not one single word of these stories."

"You mean you think he didn't make her go?"

"I know he didn't. I'm perfectly positive."

"You can't believe that Angelica really knew Letty was so ill?" her tone was frankly incredulous.

"Of course I can't answer that. I don't know anything about what she thought; but I am certain that if she didn't understand, it wasn't Mr. Blackburn's fault." Afterwards, when she recalled it, her indignant defence of David Blackburn amused her. Why should she care what people said of him?

"But they say she didn't know. Mrs. Mallow told me she heard from someone who was there that Angelica turned on her husband when she came in and asked him why he had kept it from her?"

The hopelessness of her cause aroused Caroline's fighting blood, and she remembered that her father used to say the best battles of the war were fought after defeat. Strange how often his philosophy and experience of life came back to inspirit her!

"Well, perhaps she didn't understand, but Mr. Blackburn wasn't to blame. I am sure of it," she answered firmly.

Mrs. Colfax looked at her sharply. "Do you like David Blackburn?" she inquired without malice.

Caroline flushed. "I neither like nor dislike him," she retorted courageously, and wondered how long it would take the remark to circulate over Richmond. Mrs. Colfax was pretty, amiable, and amusing; but she was one of those light and restless women, as clear as running water, on whose sparkling memories scandals float like straws. Nothing ever sank to the depths—or perhaps there were no depths in the luminous shoals of her nature.

"Well, the reason I asked," Daisy had become ingratiating, "is that you talk exactly like Cousin Matty."

"Do I?" Caroline laughed. "Mrs. Timberlake is a very sensible woman."

"Yes, mother insists that she is as sharp as a needle, even if it is so hard to get anything out of her. Oh, I've kept you an age—and, good Heavens, it is long past my appointment at the dentist's! I can't tell you how glad I am that I met you, and you may be sure that whenever

I hear these things repeated, I am going to say that you don't believe one single word of them. It is splendid of you to stand up for what you think, and that reminds me of the nice things I heard Roane Fitzhugh saying about you at the Mallow's the other night. He simply raved over you. I couldn't make him talk about anything else."

"I don't like to be disagreeable, but what he thinks doesn't interest me in the least," rejoined Caroline coldly.

Daisy laughed delightedly. "Now, that's too bad, because I believe he is falling in love with you. He told me he went motoring with you and Angelica almost every afternoon. Take my word for it, Miss Meade, Roane isn't half so black as he is painted, and he's just the sort that would settle down when he met the right woman. Good-bye again! I have enjoyed so much my little chat with you."

She rushed off to her car, while Caroline turned quickly into a cross street, and hastened to meet Angelica at the office of a new doctor, who was treating her throat. A few drops of rain were falling, and ahead of her, when she reached Franklin Street, the city, with its church spires and leafless trees, emerged indistinctly out of the mist. Here the long street was almost deserted, except for a blind negro beggar, whose stick tapped the pavement behind her, and a white and liver-coloured setter nosing adventurously in the gutter. Then, in the middle of the block, she saw Angelica's car waiting, and a minute later, to her disgust, she discerned the face of Roane Fitzhugh at the window. As she recognized him, the anger that Mrs. Colfax's casual words had aroused, blazed up in her without warning;

and she told herself that she would leave Briarlay before she would allow herself to be gossiped about with a man she detested.

While she approached, Roane opened the door and jumped out. "Come inside and wait, Miss Meade," he said. "Anna Jeannette is still interviewing old skull and cross-bones."

"I'd rather wait in the office, thank you." She swept past him with dignity, but before she reached the steps of the doctor's house, he had overtaken her.

"Oh, I say, don't crush a chap! Haven't you seen enough of me yet to discover that I am really as harmless as I look? You don't honestly think me a rotter, do you?"

"I don't think about you."

"The unkindest cut of all! Now, if you only knew it, your thinking of me would do a precious lot of good. By the way, how is my niece?"

"Very well. You'd scarcely know she'd been ill."

"And she didn't see the tableaux, after all, poor kid. Well, Anna Jeannette was a stunner. I suppose you saw her picture in the papers. The Washington *Examiner* spoke of her as the most beautiful woman in Virginia. That takes old Black, I bet!"

Caroline had ascended the steps, and as she was about to touch the bell, the door opened quickly, and Angelica appeared, lowering a net veil which was covered with a large spiral pattern. She looked slightly perturbed, and when she saw Roane a frown drew her delicate eyebrows together. Her colour had faded, leaving a sallow tone to her skin, which was of the fine, rose-leaf texture that withers early.

"I can't take you to-day, Roane," she remarked

hastily. "We must go straight back to Briarlay. Miss Meade came in to do some shopping for Letty."

"You'll have to take me as far as Monument Avenue." He was as ready as ever. "It is a long way, Anna Jeannette. I cannot walk, to crawl I am ashamed."

"Well, get in, and please try to behave yourself."

"If behaviour is all that you expect, I shall try to satisfy you. The truth is I'm dead broke, and being broke always makes a Christian of me. I feel as blue as old Black."

"Oh, Roane, stop joking!" Her sweetness was growing prickly. "You don't realize that when you run on like this people think you are serious. I have just heard some silly talk about Miss Meade and you, and it came from nothing in the world except your habit of saying everything that comes into your mind."

"In the first place, my dear Anna, nothing that you hear of Miss Meade could be silly, and in the second place, I've never spoken her name except when I was serious."

"Well, you ought to be more careful how you talk to Daisy Colfax. She repeats everything in the world that she hears."

He laughed shortly. "You'd say that if you'd heard the hot shot she gave me last night about you and Blackburn. Look here, Anna Jeannette, hadn't you better call a halt on the thing?"

She flushed indignantly. "I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about."

"Oh, it's all rot, I know, but how the deuce does such tittle-tattle get started? I beg your pardon, Miss Meade, I am addressing you not as a woman, but as a fount of justice and equity, and in the presence of Anna Jeannette, I ask you frankly if you don't think it's a

bit rough on old Black? We had our quarrel, and I assure you that I have no intention of voting with him; but when it comes to knifing a man in the back, then I must beg the adorable Daisy to excuse me. It takes a woman to do that—and, by Jove, old Black may be a bit of a heavyweight, but he is neither a coward nor a liar."

"I think you are right," responded Caroline, and it was the first time that she had ever agreed with an opinion of Roane's.

"I wish I knew what you are talking about," said Angelica wearily, "Roane, do you get out here?"

"I do, with regret." As he glanced back from the pavement, his face, except for the droop of the well-cut lips and the alcoholic puffs under the gay blue eyes, might have been a thicker and grosser copy of Angelica's. "Will you take me to-morrow?"

Mrs. Blackburn shook her head. "I am obliged to go to a meeting."

He appeared to catch at the idea. "Then perhaps Miss Meade and Letty may take pity on me?"

A worried look sharpened Angelica's features, but before she could reply, Caroline answered quickly, "We are not going without Mrs. Blackburn. Letty and I would just as soon walk."

"Ah, you walk, do you? Then we may meet some day in the road." Though he spoke jestingly, there was an undercurrent of seriousness in his voice.

"We don't walk in the road, and we like to go by ourselves. We are studying nature." As she responded she raised her eyes, and swept his face with a careless and indifferent glance.

"Take your hand from the door, Roane," said Mrs.

Blackburn, "and the next time you see Daisy Colfax, please remember what I told you."

The car started while she was speaking, and a minute later, as Roane's figure passed out of sight, she observed playfully, "You mustn't let that bad brother of mine annoy you, Miss Meade. He doesn't mean all that he says."

"I am sure that he doesn't mean anything," returned Caroline with a smile, "but, if you don't mind, I'd rather not go to drive with him again."

The look of sharpness and worry disappeared from Angelica's face. "It is such a comfort, the way you take things," she remarked. "One can always count on your intelligence."

"I shouldn't have thought that it required intelligence to see through your brother," retorted Caroline gaily. "Any old common sense might do it!"

"Can you understand," Angelica gazed at her as if she were probing her soul, "what his attraction is for women?"

"No, I can't. I hope you don't mind my speaking the truth?"

"Not in the least." Angelica was unusually responsive. "But you couldn't imagine how many women have been in love with him. It isn't any secret that Daisy Colfax was wild about him the year she came out. The family broke it up because Roane was so dissipated, but everybody knows she still cared for Roane when she married Robert."

"She seems happy now with Mr. Colfax."

"Well, I don't mean that she isn't. There are some women who can settle down with almost any man, and though I am very fond of dear Daisy, there isn't any use

pretending that she hasn't a shallow nature. Still there are people, you know, who say that she isn't really as satisfied as she tries to make you believe, and that her rushing about as much as she does is a sign that she regrets her marriage. I am sure, whatever she feels or doesn't feel, that she is the love of poor Roane's life."

It was not Angelica's habit to gossip, and while she ran on smoothly, reciting her irrelevant detail as if it were poetry, Caroline became aware that there was a serious motive beneath her apparent flippancy. "I suppose she is trying to warn me away from Roane," she thought scornfully, "as if there were any need of it!"

After this they were both silent until the car turned into the drive and stopped before the white columns. The happiness Caroline had once felt in the mere presence of Angelica had long ago faded, though she still thought her lovely and charming, and kind enough if one were careful not to cross her desires. She did not judge her harshly for her absence on the night of Letty's illness, partly because Letty had recovered, and partly because she was convinced that there had been an unfortunate misunderstanding—that Blackburn had failed to speak as plainly as he ought to have done. "Of course he thought he did," she had decided, in a generous effort to clear everybody from blame, "but the fact remains that there was a mistake—that Mrs. Blackburn did not take it just as he meant it." This, in the circumstances, was the best she felt that anybody could do. If neither Blackburn nor Angelica was to blame, then surely she must shift the responsibility to that flimsy abstraction she defined as "the way things happen in life."

Upstairs in the nursery they broke in upon a flutter of joyous excitement. Mary had just returned after a month's absence, and Letty was busily arranging a doll's tea party in honour of her aunt's arrival. The child looked pale and thin, but she had on a new white dress, and had tied a blue bow on her hair, which was combed primly back from her forehead. Mammy Riah had drawn the nursery table in front of the fire, and she was now placing a row of white and blue cups, and some plates of sponge cake and thinly sliced bread and butter, on the embroidered cloth she had borrowed from Mrs. Timberlake. The dignified old negress, in her full-waisted dress of black bombazine and her spotless white turban, was so unlike the demented figure that had crouched by the hearth on the night of Letty's illness, that, if Caroline had been less familiar with the impressionable mind of the negro, she would not have recognized her.

"So I'm back," said Mary, looking at them with her kind, frank glance, as they entered. She was still in her travelling clothes, and Caroline thought she had never seen her so handsome as she was in the smartly cut suit of brown homespun. "Letty is going to give me a party, only she must hurry, for if I don't get on a horse soon I'll forget how to sit in the saddle. Well, Angelica, I hear you were the whole show in the tableaux," she pursued in her nice, slangy manner, which was so perfectly in character with her boyish face and her straight, loose-limbed figure. "Your picture was in at least six magazines, though, I must say, they made you look a little too spectral for my taste. How are you feeling? You are just a trifle run down, aren't you?"

"Of course Letty's illness was a great strain," replied Angelica. "One never realizes how such shocks tell until they are over."

"Poor lamb! Look here, Letty, who is coming to this feast of joy? Do you mind if I bolt in the midst of it?"

"Father's coming and Aunt Matty," replied the child. "I couldn't have anybody else because mammy thought mother wouldn't like me to ask John. I like John, and he's white anyway."

"Oh, the footman! Well, as long as you haven't invited him, I suppose there'll be only home folks. I needn't stand on formality with your father and Cousin Matty."

"And there's mother—you'll come, won't you, mother?—and Miss Meade," added Letty.

"Yes, I'll come," responded Angelica. "I'm dying for my tea, dear, isn't it ready?"

"May I pour it for you? I'll be very careful, and I know just how you like it."

"Yes, you may pour it, but let Mammy Riah help you. Here's your father now, and Cousin Matty."

"Hallo, David!" Mary's voice rang out clearly. "You look just a bit seedy, don't you? Letty's illness seems to have knocked out everybody except the youngster herself. Even Miss Meade looks as if she'd been giving too much medicine." Then she turned to embrace Mrs. Timberlake, while Blackburn crossed the room and sat down near the fireplace.

"Well, daughter, it isn't a birthday, is it?"

Letty, with her head bent sideways, and her small mouth screwed up very tight, was pouring Angelica's tea with the aid of Mammy Riah. "You mustn't talk

to me while I am pouring, father," she answered seriously. "I am so afraid I shall spill it, and mother can't bear to have it spilt."

"All right. I'll talk to your Aunt Mary. Any news, Mary?"

"Yes, there's news, David. Alan is coming in for his own, and it looks as if his own were enough for us."

"You mean the old man in Chicago——?"

"He died last week, just as he was celebrating his ninetieth birthday. At ninety one couldn't reasonably have asked for very much more, do you think?"

"And is Alan his heir?"

"His one and only. To be sure he wrote a will a few weeks ago and left every cent of it—I can't begin to remember the millions—to some missionary society, but fortunately he had neglected or forgotten to sign it. So Alan gets the whole thing, bless his heart, and he's out there now in Chicago having legal bouts with a dozen or more lawyers."

For the first time Angelica spoke. "Is it true that Alan will be one of the richest men in the West?" she asked slowly. "Thank you, Letty, darling, my tea is exactly right."

"If he gets it all, and he is going to unless another will and a missionary society come to light. My dear Angelica, when you see me a year hence," she continued whimsically, "you won't recognize your dependent sister. Alan says he is going to give me a string of pearls even finer than yours."

She spoke jestingly, yet as Caroline watched Angelica's face, it occurred to her that Mary was not always tactful. The girl ought to have known by this time

that Angelica had no sense of humour and could not bear to be teased.

"It's funny, isn't it, the way life works out?" said Mrs. Timberlake. "To think of Mary's having more things than Angelica! It doesn't seem natural, somehow."

"No, it doesn't," assented Mary, in her habitual tone of boyish chaffing. "But as far as the 'things' go, Angelica needn't begin to worry. Give me Alan and a good horse, and she may have all the pearls that ever came out of the ocean."

"I read an account in some magazine of the jewels old Mrs. Wythe left," remarked Angelica thoughtfully. "She owned the finest emeralds in America." Her reflections, whatever they were, brought the thin, cold look to her features.

"Can you imagine me wearing the finest emeralds in America?" demanded Mary. "There's a comfort for you, at any rate, in the thought that they wouldn't be becoming to you. Green isn't your colour, my dear, and white stones are really the only ones that suit you. Now, I am so big and bold that I could carry off rubies." Her laughing tone changed suddenly, "Why, Angelica, what is the matter? Have you a headache?"

"I feel very tired. The truth is I haven't quite got over the strain of Letty's illness. When does Alan come back, dear? I suppose you won't put off the wedding much longer? Mother used to say that a long engagement meant an unhappy marriage."

"Alan gets back next week, I hope, and as for the wedding—well, we haven't talked it over, but I imagine we'll settle on the early summer—June probably. It's a pity it has to be so quiet, or I might have Miss Meade

for a bridesmaid. She'd make an adorable bridesmaid in an orchid-coloured gown and a flower hat, wouldn't she, Cousin Matty?"

"I'd rather dress you in your veil and orange blossoms," laughed Caroline. "Diana or I have pinned on almost every wedding veil of the last five years in southside Virginia."

"Oh, is Aunt Mary really going to be married at last?" asked Letty, with carefully subdued excitement, "and may I go to church? I do hope I shan't have to miss it as I did mother's tableau," she added wistfully.

"You shan't miss it, dearie," said Mary, "not if I have to be married up here in the nursery."

Angelica had risen, and she stooped now to pick up her furs which she had dropped.

"Your tea was lovely, Letty dear," she said gently, "but I'm so tired that I think I'll go and lie down until dinner."

"You must pick up before Alan gets back," remarked Mary lightly. "He thinks you the most beautiful woman in the world, you know."

"He does? How very sweet of him!" exclaimed Angelica, turning in the doorway, and throwing an animated glance back into the room. Her face, which had been wan and listless an instant before, was now glowing, while her rare, lovely smile irradiated her features.

When she had gone, Mary went to change into her riding clothes, and Caroline slipped away to take off her hat. A few minutes later, she came back with some brown yarn in her hand, and found that Blackburn was still sitting in the big chintz-covered chair by the hearth. Letty had dragged a footstool to the rug, and she was

leaning against her father's knee while he questioned her about the stories in her reader.

"I know Miss Meade can tell you," said the child as Caroline entered. "Miss Meade, do you remember the story about the little girl who got lost and went to live with the fairies? Is it in my reader? Father, what is the difference between an angel and a fairy? Mrs. Aylett says that mother is an angel. Is she a fairy too?"

"You'd think she was sometimes to look at her," replied Blackburn, smiling.

"Well, if mother is an angel, why aren't you one? I asked Mrs. Aylett that, but she didn't tell me."

"You could scarcely blame her," laughed Blackburn. "It is a hard question."

"I asked Miss Meade, too, but she didn't tell me either."

"Now, I should have thought better of Miss Meade." As Blackburn lifted his face, it looked young and boyish. "Is it possible that she is capable of an evasion?"

"What does that word mean, father?"

"It means everything, my daughter, that Miss Meade is not."

"You oughtn't to tease the child, David," said Mrs. Timberlake. "She is so easily excited."

Caroline and the old lady had both unfolded their knitting; and the clicking of their needles made a cheerful undercurrent to the conversation. The room looked homelike and pleasant in the firelight, and leaning back in his chair, Blackburn gazed with half-closed eyes at the two women and the child outlined against the shimmering glow of the flames.

"You are like the Fates," he said presently after a

silence in which Letty sank drowsily against him. "Do you never put down your knitting?"

"Well, Angelica promised so many, and it makes her nervous to hear the needles," rejoined Mrs. Timberlake.

"It is evidently soothing to you and Miss Meade."

"The difference, I reckon, is that we don't stop to think whether it is or not." Mrs. Timberlake was always curt when she approached the subject of Angelica. "I've noticed that when you can't afford nerves, you don't seem to have them."

"That's considerate of nature, to say the least." His voice had borrowed the chaffing tone of Mary's.

As if in response to his words, Mrs. Timberlake rolled up the half-finished muffler, thrust her long knitting needles through the mesh, and leaned forward until she met Blackburn's eyes.

"David," she said in a low, harsh voice, "there is something I want to ask you, and Miss Meade might as well hear it. Is Letty asleep?"

"She is dozing, but speak guardedly. This daughter of mine is a keen one."

"Well, she won't understand what I am talking about. Did you or did you not think that you had spoken plainly to Angelica that evening?"

He looked at her through narrowed lids.

"What does she say?"

"She says she didn't understand. It is all over town that she didn't know Lettv's condition was serious."

"Then why do you ask me? If she didn't understand, I must have blundered in the telling. That's the only possible answer to your question."

He rose as he spoke, and lifting Letty from the foot-

stool, placed her gently between the deep arms of the chair.

"Isn't there anything that you can say, David?"

"No, that seems to be the trouble. There isn't anything that I can say." Already he was on his way to the door, and as he glanced back, Caroline noticed that, in spite of his tenderness with the child, his face looked sad and stern. "There's a man waiting for me downstairs," he added, "but I'll see you both later. Wake Letty before long or she won't sleep to-night."

Then he went out quickly, while Mrs. Timberlake turned to take up her knitting.

"If I didn't know that David Blackburn had plenty of sense about some things," she remarked grimly while she drew the needle from the roll, "I'd be tempted to believe that he was a perfect fool."

CHAPTER XIII

Indirect Influence

In January a heavy snow fell, and Letty, who had begun to cough again, was kept indoors for a week. After the morning lessons were over, Mammy Riah amused the child, while Caroline put on her hat and coat, and went for a brisk walk down the lane to the road. Once or twice Mary joined her, but since Alan's return Caroline saw the girl less and less, and no one else in the house appeared to have the spirit for exercise. Blackburn she met only at breakfast and luncheon, and since Christmas he seemed to have become completely engrossed in his plans. After the talk she had heard on the terrace, his figure slowly emerged out of the mist of perplexity in her mind. He was no longer the obscure protagonist of a vague political unrest, for the old dishonourable bond which had linked him, in her imagination, to the Southern Republicans of her father's day, was broken forever. She was intelligent enough to grasp the difference between the forces of reaction and development; and she understood now that Blackburn had worked out a definite theory—that his thinking had crystallized into a constructive social philosophy. "He knows the South, he understands it," she thought. "He sees it, not made, but becoming. That is the whole difference between him and father. Father was as patriotic as Mr. Blackburn, but father's patriotism clung to the past—it was

grateful and commemorative—and Mr. Blackburn's strives toward the future, for it is active and creative. Father believed that the South was separate from the Union, like one of the sacred old graveyards, with bricked-up walls, in the midst of cornfields, while the younger man, also believing it to be sacred, is convinced that it must be absorbed into the nation—that its traditions and ideals must go to enrich the common soil of America." Already she was beginning insensibly to associate Blackburn with the great group of early Virginians, with the men in whom love of country was a vital and living thing, the men who laid the foundation and planned the structure of the American Republic.

"Do you think Mr. Blackburn feels as strongly as he talks?" she asked Mrs. Timberlake one afternoon when they were standing together by the nursery window. It had been snowing hard, and Caroline, in an old coat with a fur cap on her head, was about to start for a walk.

Mrs. Timberlake was staring intently through her spectacles at one of the snow-laden evergreens on the lawn. A covering of powdery white wrapped the drive and the landscape, and, now and then, when the wind rattled the ice-coated branches of the elms, there was a sharp crackling noise as of breaking boughs.

"I reckon he does," she replied after a pause, "though I can't see to save my life what he expects to get out of it."

"Do you think it is ambition with him? It seems to me, since I heard him talk, that he really believes he has a message, that he can serve his country. Until I met him," Caroline added, half humorously, "I had begun to feel that the men of to-day loved their country only for what they could get out of it."

"Well, I expect David is as disinterested as anybody else," observed Mrs. Timberlake drily, "but that seems to me all the more reason why he'd better let things jog along as they are, and not try to upset them. But there isn't any use talking. David sets more store by those ideas of his than he does by any living thing in the world, unless it's Letty. They are his life, and I declare I sometimes think he feels about them as he used to feel about Angelica before he married her—the sort of thing you never expect to see outside of poetry." She had long ago lost her reserve in Caroline's presence, and the effect of what she called "bottling up" for so many years, gave a crispness and roundness to her thoughts which was a refreshing contrast to Angelica's mental vagueness.

"I can understand it," said Caroline, "I mean I can understand a man's wanting to have some part in moulding the thought of his time. Father used to be like that. Only it was Virginia, not America, that he cared for. He wanted to help steer Virginia over the rapids, he used to say. I was brought up in the midst of politics. That's the reason it sounded so natural to me when Mr. Blackburn was talking."

Letty, who had been playing with her dolls on the hearthrug, deserted them abruptly, and ran over to the window.

"Oh, Miss Meade, do you think I am going to be well for Aunt Mary's wedding?"

"Why, of course you are. This is only January, darling, and the wedding won't be till June."

"And is that a very long time?"

"Months and months. The roses will be blooming, and you will have forgotten all about your cold."

"Well, I hope I shan't miss that too," murmured the child, going gravely back to her dolls.

"I never heard anything like the way that child runs on," said Mrs. Timberlake, turning away from the window. "Are you really going out in this cold? There doesn't seem a bit of sense in getting chilled to the bone unless you are obliged to."

"Oh, I like it. It does me good."

"You've stopped motoring with Angelica, haven't you?"

"Yes, we haven't been for several weeks. For one thing the weather has been so bad."

"I got an idea it was because of Roane Fitzhugh," said the old lady, in her tart way. "I hope you won't think I am interfering, but I'm old and you're young, and so you won't mind my giving you a little wholesome advice. If I were you, my dear, I shouldn't pay a bit of attention to anything that Roane says to me."

"But I don't. I never have," rejoined Caroline indignantly. "How on earth could you have got such an idea?"

A look of mystification flickered over Mrs. Timberlake's face. "Well, I am sure I don't mean any harm, my child," she responded soothingly. "I didn't think you would mind a word of warning from an old woman, and I know that Roane can have a very taking way when he wants to."

"I think he's hateful—perfectly hateful," replied Caroline. Then, drawing on her heavy gloves, she shook her head with a laugh as she started to the door. "If that's all you have to worry about, you may rest easy," she tossed back gaily. "Letty, darling, when I come

in I'll tell you all about my adventures and the bears I meet in the lane."

The terrace and the garden were veiled in white, and the only sound in the intense frozen stillness was the crackling of elm boughs as the wind rocked them. A heavy cloud was hanging low in the west, and beneath it a flock of crows flew slowly in blue-black curves over the white fields. For a minute or two Caroline stood watching them, and, while she paused there, a clear silver light streamed suddenly in rays over the hills, and the snow-covered world looked as if it were imprisoned in crystal. Every frosted branch, every delicate spiral on the evergreens, was intensified and illuminated. Then the wind swept up with a rush of sound from the river, and it was as if the shining landscape had found a melodious voice—as if it were singing. The frozen fountain and the white trees and the half buried shrubs under the mounds of snow, joined in presently like harps in a heavenly choir. "I suppose it is only the wind," she thought, "but it is just as if nature were praising God with music and prayer."

In the lane the trees were silvered, and little darting shadows, like violet birds, chased one another down the long white vista to the open road. Walking was difficult on the slippery ground, and Caroline went carefully, stopping now and then to look up into the swinging boughs overhead, or to follow the elusive flight of the shadows. When she reached the end of the lane, she paused, before turning, to watch a big motor car that was ploughing through the heavy snowdrifts. A moment later the car stopped just in front of her, a man jumped out into a mound of snow, and she found herself reluctantly shaking hands with Roane Fitzhugh.

"Tom Benton was taking me into town," he explained, "but as soon as I saw you, I told him he'd have to go on alone. So this is where you walk? Lucky trees."

"I was just turning." As she spoke she moved back into the lane. "It is a pity you got out."

"Oh, somebody else will come along presently. I'm in no sort of hurry."

His face was flushed and mottled, and she suspected, from the excited look in his eyes, that he had been drinking. Even with her first impulse of recoil, she felt the pity of his wasted and ruined charm. With his straight fine features, so like Angelica's, his conquering blue eyes, and his thick fair hair, he was like the figure of a knight in some early Flemish painting.

"It's jolly meeting you this way," he said, a trifle thickly. "By Jove, you look stunning—simply stunning."

"Please don't come with me. I'd rather go back alone," she returned, with chill politeness. "Your sister went into Richmond an hour ago. I think she is at a reception Mrs. Colfax is giving."

"Well, I didn't come to see Anna Jeannette." He spoke this time with exaggerated care as if he were pronouncing a foreign language. "Don't hurry, Miss Meade. I'm not a tiger. I shan't eat you. Are you afraid?"

"Of you?" she glanced at him scornfully. "How could you hurt me?"

"How indeed? But if not of me, of yourself? I've seen women afraid of themselves, and they hurried just as you are doing."

Unconsciously her steps slackened. "I am not afraid of myself, and if I were, I shouldn't run away."

"You mean you'd stay and fight it out?"

"I mean I'd stay and get the better of the fear, or what caused it. I couldn't bear to be afraid."

His careless gaze became suddenly intense, and before the red sparks that glimmered in his eyes, she drew hastily to the other side of the lane. A wave of physical disgust, so acute that it was like nausea, swept over her. Even in the hospital the sight of a drunken man always affected her like this, and now it was much worse because the brute—she thought of him indignantly as "the brute"—was actually trying to make love to her—to her, Caroline Meade!

"Then if you aren't afraid of me, why do you avoid me?" he demanded.

At this she stopped short in order to face him squarely. "Since you wish to know," she replied slowly, "I avoid you because I don't like the kind of man you are."

He lowered his eyes for an instant, and when he raised them they were earnest and pleading. "Then make me the kind of man you like. You can if you try. You could do anything with me if you cared—you are so good."

"I don't care." A temptation to laugh seized her, but she checked it, and spoke gravely. The relations between men and women, which had seemed as natural and harmonious as the interdependence of the planets, had become jangled and discordant. Something had broken out in her universe which threatened to upset its equilibrium. "I don't doubt that there are a number of good women who would undertake your regeneration, but I like my work better," she added distantly. She was sure now that he had been drinking, and, as he came nearer and the smell of whiskey reached her, she

quickened her steps almost into a run over the frozen ground. Some deep instinct told her that at her first movement of flight he would touch her, and she thought quite calmly, with the clearness and precision of mind she had acquired in the hospital, that if he were to touch her she would certainly strike him. She was not frightened—her nerves were too robust for fear—but she was consumed with a still, cold rage, which made even the icy branches feel warm as they brushed her cheek.

"Now, you are running again, Miss Meade. Why won't you be kind to me? Can't you see that I am mad about you? Ever since the first day I saw you, you've been in my thoughts every minute. Honestly you could make a man out of me, if you'd only be a little bit human. I'll do anything you wish. I'll be anything you please, if you'll only like me."

For a moment she thought he was going to break down and cry, and she wondered, with professional concern, if a little snow on his forehead would bring him to his senses. This was evidently the way he had talked to Mary when Blackburn ordered him out of the house.

"I wish you would go back," she said in a tone she used to delirious patients in the hospital. "We are almost at the house, and Mr. Blackburn wouldn't like your coming to Briarlay."

"Well, the old chap's in town, isn't he?"

"It is time for him to come home. He may be here any moment." Though she tried to reason the question with him, she was conscious of a vague, uneasy suspicion that they were rapidly approaching the state where reasoning would be as futile as flight. Then she remembered hearing somewhere that a drunken man

would fall down if he attempted to run, and she considered for an instant making an open dash for the house.

"I'll go, if you'll let me come back to-morrow. I'm not a bad fellow, Miss Meade." A sob choked him. "I've got a really good heart—ask Anna Jeannette if I haven't——"

"I don't care whether you are bad or not. I don't want to know anything about you. Only go away. Nothing that you can do will make me like you," she threw out unwisely under the spur of anger. "Women never think that they can cajole or bully a person into caring—only men imagine they have the power to do that, and it's all wrong because they can't, and they never have. Bullying doesn't do a bit more good than whining, so please stop that, too. I don't like you because I don't respect you, and nothing you can say or do will have the slightest effect unless you were to make yourself into an entirely different sort of man—a man I didn't despise." Her words pelted him like stones, and while he stood there, blinking foolishly beneath the shower, she realized that he had not taken in a single sentence she had uttered. He looked stunned but obstinate, and a curious dusky redness was beating like a pulse in his forehead.

"You can't fight me," he muttered huskily. "Don't fight me."

"I am not fighting you. I am asking you to go away."

"I told you I'd go, if you'd let me come back to-morrow."

"Of course I shan't. How dare you ask me such a thing? Can't you see how you disgust me?"

As she spoke she made a swift movement toward the turn in the lane, and the next minute, while her feet slipped on the ice, she felt Roane's arms about her, and knew that he was struggling frantically to kiss her lips. For years no man had kissed her, and as she fought wildly to escape, she was possessed not by terror, but by a blind and primitive fury. Civilization dropped away from her, and she might have been the first woman struggling against attack in the depths of some tropic jungle. "I'd like to kill you," she thought, and freeing one arm, she raised her hand and struck him between the eyes. "I wonder why some woman hasn't killed him before this? I believe I am stronger than he is."

The blow was not a soft one, and his arms fell away from her, while he shook his head as if to prevent a rush of blood to the brain. "You hurt me—I believe you wanted to hurt me," he muttered in a tone of pained and incredulous surprise. Then recovering his balance with difficulty, he added reproachfully, "I didn't know you could hit like that. I thought you were more womanly. I thought you were more womanly," he repeated sorrowfully, while he put his hand to his head, and then gazed at it, as if he expected to find blood on his fingers.

"Now, perhaps you'll go," said Caroline quietly. While the words were on her lips, she became aware that a shadow had fallen over the snow at her side, and glancing round, she saw Blackburn standing motionless in the lane. Her first impression was that he seemed enormous as he stood there, with his hands hanging at his sides, and the look of sternness and immobility in his face. His eyelids were half closed with the trick he

had when he was gazing intently, and the angry light seemed to have changed his eyes from grey to hazel.

"I am sorry to interrupt you," he said in a voice that had a dangerous quietness, "but I think Roane is scarcely in a fit state for a walk."

"I'd like to know why I am not?" demanded Roane, sobered and resentful. "I'm not drunk. Who says I am drunk?"

"Well, if you aren't, you ought to be." Then the anger which Blackburn had kept down rushed into his voice. "You had better go!"

Roane had stopped blinking, and while the redness ebbed from his forehead, he stood staring helplessly not at Blackburn, but at Caroline. "I'll go," he said at last, "if Miss Meade will say that she forgives me."

But there was little of the sister of mercy in Caroline's heart. She had been grossly affronted, and anger devoured her like a flame. Her blue eyes shone, her face flushed and paled with emotion, and, for the moment, under the white trees, in the midst of the frosted world, her elusive beauty became vivid and dazzling.

"I shall not forgive you, and I hope I shall never see you again," she retorted.

"You'd better go, Roane," repeated Blackburn quietly, and as Caroline hurried toward the house, he overtook her with a rapid step, and said in a troubled voice, "It is partly my fault, Miss Meade. I have intended to warn you."

"To warn me?" Her voice was crisp with anger.

"I felt that you did not understand."

"Understand what?" She looked at him with puzzled eyes. "I may be incredibly stupid, but I don't understand now."

For an instant he hesitated, and she watched a deeper flush rise in his face. "In a way you are under my protection," he said at last, "and for this reason I have meant to warn you against Roane Fitzhugh—against the danger of these meetings."

"These meetings?" Light burst on her while she stared on him. "Is it possible that you think this was a meeting? Do you dream that I have been seeing Roane Fitzhugh of my own accord? Have you dared to think such a thing? To imagine that I wanted to see him—that I came out to meet him?" The note of scorn ended in a sob while she buried her face in her hands, and stood trembling with shame and anger before him.

"But I understood. I was told——" He was stammering awkwardly. "Isn't it true that you felt an interest—that you were trying to help him?"

At this her rage swept back again, and dropping her hands, she lifted her swimming eyes to his face. "How dare you think such a thing of me?"

"I am sorry." He was still groping in darkness. "You mean you did not know he was coming to-day?"

"Of course I didn't know. Do you think I should have come out if I had known?"

"And you have never met him before? Never expected to meet him?"

"Oh, what are you saying? Why can't you speak plainly?" A shiver ran through her.

"I understood that you liked him." After her passionate outburst his voice sounded strangely cold and detached.

"And that I came out to meet him?"

"I was afraid that you met him outside because I had

forbidden him to come to Briarlay. I wanted to explain to you—to protect you——"

"But I don't need your protection." She had thrown back her head, and her shining eyes met his bravely. Her face had grown pale, but her lips were crimson, and her voice was soft and rich. "I don't need your protection, and after what you have thought of me, I can't stay here any longer. I can't——"

As her words stopped, checked by the feeling of helplessness that swept her courage away, he said very gently, "But there isn't any reason—— Why, I haven't meant to hurt you. I'm a bit rough, perhaps, but I'd as soon think of hurting Letty. No, don't run away until I've said a word to you. Let's be reasonable, if there has been a misunderstanding. Come, now, suppose we talk it out as man to man."

His tone had softened, but in her resentment she barely noticed the change. "No, I'd rather not. There isn't anything to say," she answered hurriedly. Then, as she was about to run into the house, she paused and added, "Only—only how could you?"

He said something in reply, but before it reached her, she had darted up the steps and into the hall. She felt bruised and stiff, as if she had fallen and hurt herself, and the one thought in her mind was the dread of meeting one of the household—of encountering Mary or Mrs. Timberlake, before she had put on her uniform and her professional manner. It seemed impossible to her that she should stay on at Briarlay, and yet what excuse could she give Angelica for leaving so suddenly? Angelica, she surmised, would not look tolerantly upon any change that made her uncomfortable.

The dazzling light of the sunset was still in Caroline's

eyes, and, for the first moment or two after she entered the house, she could distinguish only a misty blur from the open doors of the drawing-room. Then the familiar objects started out of the gloom, and she discerned the gilt frame and the softly blended dusk of the Sistine Madonna over the turn in the staircase. As she reached the floor above, her heart, which had been beating wildly, grew gradually quiet, and she found herself thinking lucidly, "I must go away. I must go away at once—to-night." Then the mist of obscurity floated up to envelop the thought. "But what does it mean? Could there be any possible reason?"

The nursery door was open, and she was about to steal by noiselessly, when Mrs. Timberlake's long, thin shadow stretched, with a vaguely menacing air, over the threshold.

"I wanted to speak to you, my dear. Why, what is the matter?" As the housekeeper came out into the hall, she raised her spectacles to her forehead, and peered nervously into Caroline's face. "Has anybody hurt your feelings?"

"I am going away. I can't stay." Though Caroline spoke clearly and firmly, her lips were trembling, and the marks of tears were still visible under her indignant eyes, which looked large and brilliant, like the eyes of a startled child.

"You are going away? What on earth is the reason? Has anything happened?" Then lowering her voice, she murmured cautiously, "Come into my room a minute. Letty is playing and won't miss you." Putting her lean arm about Caroline's shoulders, she led her gently down the hall and to her room in the west wing. Not until she had forced her into an easy chair

by the radiator, and turned back to close the door carefully, did she say in an urgent tone, "Now, my dear, you needn't be afraid to tell me. I am very fond of you—I feel almost as if you were my own child—and I want to help you if you will let me."

"There isn't anything except—except there has been a misunderstanding——" Caroline looked up miserably from the big chair, with her lips working pathetically. All the spirit had gone out of her. "Mr. Blackburn seems to have got the idea that I care for Roane Fitzhugh—that I even went out to meet him."

Mrs. Timberlake, whose philosophy was constructed of the bare bones of experience, stared out of the window with an expression that made her appear less a woman than a cynical point of view. Her profile grew sharper and flatter until it gave the effect of being pasted on the glimmering pane.

"Well, I reckon David didn't make that up in his own mind," she observed with a caustic emphasis.

"I met him—I mean Roane Fitzhugh to-day. Of course it was by accident, but he had been drinking and behaved outrageously, and then Mr. Blackburn found us together," pursued Caroline slowly, "and—and he said things that made me see what he thought. He told me that he believed I liked that dreadful man—that I came out by appointment——"

"But don't you like him, my dear?" The housekeeper had turned from the sunset and taken up her knitting.

"Of course I don't. Why in the world—how in the world——"

"And David told you that he thought so?" The old lady looked up sharply.

"He said he understood that I liked him—Roane Fitzhugh. I didn't know what he meant. He was obliged to explain." After all, the tangle appeared to be without beginning and without end. She realized that she was hopelessly caught in the mesh of it.

"Well, I thought so, too," said Mrs. Timberlake, leaning forward and speaking in a thin, sharp voice that pricked like a needle.

"You thought so? But how could you?" Caroline stretched out her hand with an imploring gesture. "Why, I've never seen him alone until to-day—never."

"And yet David believed that you were meeting him?"

"That is what he said. It sounds incredible, doesn't it?"

For a few minutes Mrs. Timberlake knitted grimly, while the expression, "I know I am a poor creature, but all the same I have feelings" seemed to leap out of her face. When at last she spoke it was to make a remark which sounded strangely irrelevant. "I've had a hard time," she said bluntly, "and I've stood things, but I'm not one to turn against my own blood kin just because they haven't treated me right." Then, after another and a longer pause, she added, as if the words were wrung out of her, "If I didn't feel that I ought to help you I'd never say one single word, but you're so trusting, and you'd never see through things unless somebody warned you."

"See through things? You mean I'd never understand how Mr. Blackburn got that impression?"

Mrs. Timberlake twisted the yarn with a jerk over her little finger. "My dear, David never got that idea out of his own head," she repeated emphatically.

"Somebody put it there as sure as you were born, and though I've nothing in the world but my own opinion to go on, I'm willing to bet a good deal that it was Angelica."

"But she couldn't have. She knew better. There couldn't have been any reason."

"When you are as old as I am, you will stop looking for reasons in the way people act. In the first place, there generally aren't any, and in the second place, when reasons are there, they don't show up on the surface."

"But she knew I couldn't bear him."

"If you'd liked him, she wouldn't have done it. She'd have been trying too hard to keep you apart."

"You mean, then, that she did it just to hurt me?"

Lifting her slate-coloured eyes, the old lady brushed a wisp of hair back from her forehead. "I don't believe Angelica ever did a thing in her life just to hurt anybody," she answered slowly.

"Then you wouldn't think for an instant——"

"No, I shouldn't think for an instant that she did it just for that. There was some other motive. I don't reckon Angelica would ever do you any harm," she concluded with a charitable intonation, "unless there was something she wanted to gain by it." From her manner she might have been making a point in Angelica's favour.

"But even then? What could she possibly gain?"

"Well, I expect David found out that Roane had been here—that he had been motoring with you—and Angelica was obliged to find some excuse. You see, responsibility is one of the things Angelica can't stand, and whoever happens to be about when it is forced on her, usually bears it. Sometimes, you know, when she

throws it off like that, it chances to light by accident just in the proper place. The strangest thing about Angelica, and I can never get used to it, is the way she so often turns out to be right. Look at the way it all happened in Letty's illness. Now, Angelica always stuck out that Letty wouldn't die, and, as it turned out, she didn't. I declare, it looks, somehow, as if not only people, but circumstances as well, played straight into her hands."

"You mean she told him that about me just to spare herself?" Caroline's voice was angry and incredulous.

"That's how it was, I reckon. I don't believe she would have done it for anything else on earth. You see, my dear, she was brought up that way—most American girls are when they are as pretty as Angelica—and the way you're raised seems to become a habit with you. At home the others always sacrificed themselves for her, until she got into the habit of thinking that she was the centre of the universe, and that the world owed her whatever she took a fancy for. Even as a girl, Roane used to say that her feelings were just inclinations, and I expect that's been true of her ever since. She can want things worse than anybody I've ever seen, but apart from wanting, I reckon she's about as cold as a fish at heart. It may sound mean of me to say it, but I've known Cousin Abby to sit up at night and sew her eyes out, so the girl might have a new dress for a party, and all the time Angelica not saying a word to prevent it. There never was a better mother than Cousin Abby, and I've always thought it was being so good that killed her."

"But even now I can't understand," said Caroline thoughtfully. "I felt that she really liked me."

"Oh, she likes you well enough." Mrs. Timberlake was counting some dropped stitches. "She wasn't thinking about you a minute. I doubt if she ever in her life thought as long as that about anybody except herself. The curious part is," she supplemented presently, "that considering how shallow she is, so few people ever seem to see through her. It took David five years, and then he had to be married to her, to find out what I could have told him in ten minutes. Most of it is the way she looks, I expect. It is so hard for a man to understand that every woman who parts her hair in the middle isn't a Madonna."

"I knew she was hard and cold," confessed Caroline sadly, "but I thought she was good. I never dreamed she could be bad at heart."

Mrs. Timberlake shook her head. "She isn't bad, my dear, that's where you make a mistake. I believe she'd let herself be burned at the stake before she'd overstep a convention. When it comes to that," she commented with acrid philosophy, "I reckon all the bad women on earth could never do as much harm as some good ones—the sort of good ones that destroy everything human and natural that comes near them. We can look out for the bad ones—but I've come to believe that there's a certain kind of virtue that's no better than poison. It poisons everything it touches because all the humanity has passed out of it, just like one of those lovely poisonous flowers that spring up now and then in a swamp. Nothing that's made of flesh and blood could live by it, and yet it flourishes as if it were as harmless as a lily. I know I'm saying what I oughtn't to, but I saw you were getting hurt, and I wanted to spare you. It isn't that Angelica is wicked, you know,

I wouldn't have you believe that for a minute. She is sincere as far as her light goes, and if I hadn't seen David's life destroyed through and through, I suppose I shouldn't feel anything like so bitterly. But I've watched all his trust in things and his generous impulses —there was never a man who started life with finer impulses than David—wither up, one after one, just as if they were blighted."

The sunset had faded slowly, and while Caroline sat there in the big chair, gazing out on the wintry garden, it seemed to her that the advancing twilight had become so thick that it stifled her. Then immediately she realized that it was not the twilight, but the obscurity in her own mind, that oppressed and enveloped her with these heavy yet intangible shadows. Her last illusion had perished, and she could not breathe because the smoke of its destruction filled the air. At the moment it seemed to her that life could never be exactly what it was before—that the glow and magic of some mysterious enchantment had vanished. Even the garden, with its frozen vegetation and its forlorn skeletons of summer shrubs emerging from mounds of snow, appeared to have undergone a sinister transformation from the ideal back to the actuality. This was the way she had felt years ago, on that autumn day at The Cedars.

"And he never defended himself—never once," she said after a silence.

"He never will, that's not his way," rejoined Mrs. Timberlake. "She knows he never will, and I sometimes think that makes matters worse."

As Caroline brooded over this, her face cleared until the light and animation returned. "I know him better,"

she murmured presently, "but everything else has become suddenly crooked."

"I've thought that at times before I stopped trying to straighten out things." Mrs. Timberlake had put down the muffler, and while she spoke, she smoothed it slowly and carefully over her knee. In the wan light her face borrowed a remote and visionary look, like a face gazing down through the thin, cold air of the heights. She had passed beyond mutable things, this look seemed to say, and had attained at last the bleak security of mind that is never disappointed because it expects nothing. "I reckon that's why I got into the habit of keeping my mouth shut, just because I was worrying myself sick all the time thinking how different things ought to be." A chill and wintry cheerfulness flickered across the arid surface of her manner. "But I don't now. I know there isn't any use, and I get a good deal of pleasure just out of seeing what will happen. Now, you take David and Angelica. I'm wondering all the time how it will turn out. David is a big man, but even if Angelica isn't smart, she's quick enough about getting anything she wants, and I believe she is beginning to want something she hasn't got."

"When I came I didn't like Mr. Blackburn." Though the barriers of the old lady's reserve had fallen, Caroline was struggling still against an instinct of loyalty.

"Well, I didn't like him once." Mrs. Timberlake had risen, and was looking down with her pitiful, tormented smile. "It took me a long time to find out the truth, and I want to spare you all I suffered while I was finding it out. I sometimes think that nobody's experience is worth a row of pins to any one else, but all the same I am trying to help you by

telling you what I know. David has his faults. I'm not saying that he is a saint; but he has been the best friend I ever had, and I'm going to stand up for him, Angelica or no Angelica. There are some men, my poor father used to say, that never really show what they are because they get caught by life and twisted out of shape, and I reckon David is one of these. Father said, though I don't like heathen terms, that it was the fate of a man like David always to appear in the wrong and yet always to be in the right. That's a queer way of putting it, but father was a great scholar—he translated the "Iliad" before he was thirty—and I reckon he knew what he was talking about. Life was against those men, he told me once, but God was for them, and they never failed to win in the end." With the last words she faltered and broke off abruptly. "I have been talking a great deal more than I ought to, but when once I begin I never know when to stop. Angelica must have come home long ago." Bending over she laid her cheek against Caroline's hair. "You won't think of going away now, will you?"

Surprised and touched by the awkward caress, Caroline looked up gratefully. "No, I shan't think of going away now."

BOOK SECOND

REALITIES

CHAPTER I

In Blackburn's Library

The fire was burning low, and after Blackburn had thrown a fresh log on the andirons, he sat down in one of the big leather chairs by the hearth, and watched the flames as they leaped singing up the brick chimney. It was midnight—the clock in the hall was just striking—and a few minutes before, Angelica had gone languidly upstairs, after their belated return from a dinner in town. The drive home had been long and dreary, and he could still see the winter landscape, sketched in vivid outlines of black and white, under a pale moon that was riding high in the heavens. Road, fields, and houses, showed as clearly as a pen and ink drawing, and against this stark background his thoughts stood out with an abrupt and startling precision, as if they had detached themselves, one by one, from the naked forms on the horizon. There was no chance of sleep, for the sense of isolation, which had attacked him like physical pain while he drove home with Angelica, seemed to make his chaotic memories the only living things in a chill and colourless universe.

Though it was midnight, he had work to do before he went up to bed—for he had not yet given his final answer to Sloane. Already Blackburn had made his decision. Already he had worked out in his own mind the phrases of the letter; yet, before turning to his writing-table, he lingered a moment in order to weigh

more carefully the cost of his resolve. It was not an age when political altruism was either mentally convincing or morally expedient, and the quality of his patriotism would be estimated in the public mind, he was aware, by the numbers of his majority. Sloane, he was sure, had been sounding him as a possible candidate in some future political venture—yet, while he sat there, it was not of Sloane that he was thinking. Slowly the depression and bitterness gathered to a single image, and looked out upon him from the pure reticence of Angelica's features. It was as if his adverse destiny—that destiny of splendid purpose and frustrated effort—had assumed for an instant the human form through which it had wrought its work of destruction.

"Well, after all, why should I decline? It is what I have always wanted to do, and I am right."

The room was very still, and in this stillness the light quivered in pools on the brown rugs and the brown walls and the old yellowed engravings. From the high bookshelves, which lined the walls, the friendly covers of books shone down on him, with the genial responsiveness that creeps into the aspect of familiar inanimate things. Over the mantelpiece hung the one oil painting in the room, a portrait of his mother as a girl, by an unknown painter, who drew badly, but had a genuine feeling for colour. The face was small and heart-shaped, like some delicately tinted flower that has only half opened. The hair lay in bands of twilight on either side of the grave forehead, and framed the large, wistful eyes, which had a flower-like softness that made him think of black pansies. Though the mouth was pink and faintly smiling, it seemed to him to express an infinite

pathos. It was impossible for him to believe that his mother—the woman with the pallid cameo-like profile and the saintly brow under the thin dark hair—had ever faced life with that touching, expectant smile.

There had been a strong soul in that fragile body, but her courage, which was invincible, had never seemed to him the courage of happiness. She had accepted life with the fortitude of the Christian, not the joy of the Pagan; and her piety was associated in his mind with long summer Sundays, with old hymns played softly, with bare spotless rooms, and with many roses in scattered alabaster vases. Her intellect, like her character, he recalled as a curious blending of sweetness and strength. If the speculative side of her mind had ever existed, life had long ago hushed it, for her capacity for acquiescence—for unquestioning submission to the will of God—was like the glory of martyrdom. Yet, within her narrow field, the field in which religion reigned as a beneficent shade, she had thought deeply, and it seemed to Blackburn that she had never thought harshly. Her sympathy was as wide as her charity, and both covered the universe. So exquisitely balanced, so finely tempered, was her judgment of life, that after all these years, for she had died while he was still a boy, he remembered her as one whose understanding of the human heart approached the divine. "She always wanted me to do something like this," he thought, "to look forward—to stand for the future. I remember. . . ."

From the light and warmth of the room there streamed the sunshine and fragrance of an old summer. After a hot day the sun was growing faint over the gar-

den, and the long, slim shadows on the grass were so pale that they quivered between light and darkness, like the gauzy wings of gigantic dragon flies. Against a flushed sky a few bats were wheeling. Up from the sun-steeped lawn, which was never mown, drifted the mingled scents of sheepmint and box; and this unforgotten smell pervaded the garden and the lane and the porch at the back of the house, where he had stopped, before bringing home the cows, to exchange a word with his mother. The lattice door was open, and she stood there, in her black dress, with the cool, dim hall behind her.

"Mother," he said, "I have been reading about William Wallace. When I grow up, I want to fight kings."

She smiled, and her smile was like one of the slow, sad hymns they sang on Sunday afternoons. "When you grow up there may be no kings left to fight, dear."

"Will they be dead, mother?"

"They may be. One never knows, my son."

All the romance faded suddenly out of the world. "Well, if there are any left," he answered resolutely, "I am going to fight them."

He could still see her face, thin and sad, and like the closed white flowers he found sometimes growing in hollows where the sun never shone. Only her eyes, large and velvet black, seemed glowing with hope.

"There are only three things worth fighting for, my son," she said, "Your love, your faith, and your country. Nothing else matters."

"Father fought for his country, didn't he?"

"Your father fought for all three." She waited a moment, and then went on more slowly in a voice that sounded as if she were reciting a prayer, "This is what

you must never forget, my boy, that you are your father's son, and that he gave his all for the cause he believed in, and counted it fair service."

The scene vanished like one of the dissolving views of a magic lantern, and there rose before him a later summer, and another imperishable memory of his boyhood. . . .

It was an afternoon in September—one of those mellow afternoons when the light is spun like a golden web between earth and sky, and the grey dust of summer flowers rises as an incense to autumn. The harvest was gathered; the apples were reddening in the orchard; and along the rail fence by the roadside, sumach and Virginia creeper were burning slowly, like a flame that smoulders in the windless blue of the weather. Somewhere, very far away, a single partridge was calling, and nearer home, from the golden-rod and life-ever-lasting, rose the slow humming of bees.

He lay in the sun-warmed grass, with his bare feet buried in sheepmint. On the long benches, from which the green paint had rubbed off, some old men were sitting, and among them, a small coloured maid, in a dress of pink calico, was serving blackberry wine and plates of the pale yellow cake his mother made every Saturday. One of the men was his uncle, a crippled soldier, with long grey hair and shining eyes that held the rapt and consecrated vision of those who have looked through death to immortality. His crutch lay on the grass at his feet, and while he sipped his wine, he said gravely:

"A new generation is springing up, David's genera-

tion, and this must give, not the South alone, but the whole nation, a leader."

At the words the boy looked up quickly, his eyes gleaming, "What must the leader be like, uncle?"

The old soldier hesitated an instant. "He must, first of all, my boy, be predestined. No man whom God has not appointed can lead other men right."

"And how will he know if God has appointed him?"

"He will know by this—that he cannot swerve in his purpose. The man whom God has appointed sees his road straight before him, and he does not glance back or aside." His voice rose louder, over the murmur of the bees, as if it were chanting, "If the woods are filled with dangers, he does not know because he sees only his road. If the bridges have fallen, he does not know because he sees only his road. If the rivers are impassable, he does not know because he sees only his road. From the journey's beginning to its end, he sees only his road. . . ."

A log, charred through the middle, broke suddenly, scattering a shower of sparks. The multitudinous impressions of his boyhood had gathered into these two memories of summer, and of that earlier generation which had sacrificed all for a belief. It was like a mosaic in his mind, a mosaic in which heroic figures waited, amid a jewelled landscape, for the leader whom God had appointed.

The room darkened while he sat there, and from outside he heard the crackling of frost and the ceaseless rustle of wind in the junipers. On the hearthrug, across the glimmering circle of the fire, he watched

those old years flock back again, in all the fantastic motley of half-forgotten recollections. He saw the long frozen winters of his childhood, when he had waked at dawn to do the day's work of the farm before he started out to trudge five miles to the little country school, where the stove always smoked and the windows were never opened. Before this his mother had taught him his lessons, and his happiest memories were those of the hours when he sat by her side, with an antiquated geography on his knees, and watched her long slender fingers point the way to countries of absurd boundaries and unpronounceable names. She had taught him all he knew—knowledge weak in science, but rich in the invisible graces of mind and heart—and afterwards, in the uninspired method of the little school, he had first learned to distrust the kind of education with which the modern man begins the battle of life. Homespun in place of velvet, stark facts instead of the texture of romance! The mornings when, swinging his hoe, he had led his chattering band of little negroes into the cornfields, had been closer to the throbbing pulse of experience.

When he was fourteen the break had come, and his life had divided. His mother had died suddenly; the old place had been sold for a song; and the boy had come up to Richmond to make his way in a world which was too indifferent to be actually hostile. At first he had gone to work in a tobacco factory, reading after hours as long as the impoverished widow with whom he lived would let the gas burn in his room. Always he had meant to "get on"; always he had felt the controlling hand of his destiny. Even in those years of unformed motives and misdirected energies, he had been

searching—searching. The present had never been more than a brief approach to the future. He had looked always for something truer, sounder, deeper, than the actuality that enmeshed him.

Suddenly, while he sat there confronting the phantom he had once called himself, he was visited by a rush of thought which seemed to sweep on wings through his brain. Yet the moment afterwards, when he tried to seize and hold the vision that darted so gloriously out of the shining distance, he found that it had already dissolved into a sensation, an apprehension, too finely spun of light and shadow to be imprisoned in words. It was as if some incalculable discovery, some luminous revelation, had brushed him for an instant as it sped onward into the world. Once or twice in the past such a gleaming moment had just touched him, leaving him with this vague sense of loss, of something missing, of an infinitely precious opportunity which had escaped him. Yet invariably it had been followed by some imperative call to action.

"I wonder what it means now," he thought, "I suppose the truth is that I have missed things again." The inspiration no longer seemed to exist outside of his own mind; but under the clustering memories, he felt presently a harder and firmer consciousness of his own purpose, just as in his boyhood, he would sometimes, in ploughing, strike a rock half buried beneath the frail bloom of the meadows. It was the sense of reality so strong, so solid, that it brought him up, almost with a jerk of pain, from the iridescent cobwebs of his fancy; and this reality, he understood after a minute, was an acute perception of the great war that men were fighting on the other side of the world. His knowl-

edge of these terrible and splendid issues had broken through the perishable surface of thought. The illusion vanished like the bloom of the meadows; what remained was the bare rocky structure of truth. He had not meant to think of this now. He had left the evening free for his work—for the decision which must be made sooner or later; yet, through some mysterious trend of thought, every personal choice of his life seemed to become a part of the impersonal choice of humanity. The infinite issues had absorbed the finite intentions. Every decision was a ripple in the world battle between the powers of good and evil, of light and darkness. And he understood suddenly that the great abstractions for which men lay down their lives are one and indivisible—that there was not a corner of the earth where this fight for liberty could not be fought.

"I can fight here as well as over there," he thought, "if I am only big enough."

Now that his mind had got down to solid facts, to steady thinking, it worked quickly and clearly. It would be a hard fight, with all the odds against him, and yet the very difficulties appealed to him. Out of the dense fog of political theories, out of the noise and confusion of the Babel of many tongues, he could discern the dim framework of a purer social order. The foundation of the Republic was sound, he believed, only the eyes of the builders had failed, the hands of the builders had trembled. That the ideal democracy was not a dream, but an unattained reality, he had never doubted. The failure lay not in the plan, but in the achievement. There was obliquity of vision, there was even blindness, for the human mind was still afflicted by the ancient error which had brought the autocracies

of the past to destruction. Men and nations had still to learn that in order to preserve liberty it must first be surrendered—that there is no spiritual growth except through sacrifice. But it must be surrendered only to a broader, an ever-growing conception of what liberty means.

As in the sun-warmed grass on those Sunday afternoons, he still dreamed of America leading the nations. The great Virginians of the past had been Virginians first; the great Virginians of the future would be Americans. The urgent need in America, as he saw it, was for unity; and the first step toward this unity, the obliteration of sectional boundaries. In this, he felt, Virginia must lead the states. As she had once yielded her land to the nation, she must now yield her spirit. She must point the way by act, not by theory; she must vote right as well as think right.

"And to vote right," he said presently, thinking aloud, "we must first live right. People speak of a man's vote as if it were an act apart from the other acts of his life—as if they could detach it from his universal conceptions. There was a grain of truth in Uncle Carter's saying that he could tell by the way a man voted whether or not he believed in the immortality of the soul." It was Uncle Carter, he remembered, who had described the chronic malady of American life as a disease of manner that had passed from the skin into the body politic. "Take my word for it," the old soldier had said, "there is no such thing as sound morals without sound manners, for manners are only the outer coating—the skin, if you like—of morals. Without unselfish consideration for others there can be no morality, and if you have unselfish consideration in

your heart, you will have good manners though you haven't a coat on your back. Order and sanity and precision, and all the other qualities we need most in this Republic, are only the outward forms of unselfish consideration for others, and patriotism, in spite of its plumed attire, is only that on a larger scale. After all, your country is merely a tremendous abstraction of your neighbour." Well, perhaps the old chap had been talking sense half the time when people smiled at his words!

Rising from his chair, he pushed back the last waning ember, and stood gazing down on the ashes.

"I will do my best," he said slowly. "I will fight to the last ditch for the things I believe in—for cleaner politics, for constructive patriotism, and for a fairer democracy. These are the big issues, and the little ends will flow from them."

As he finished, the clock in the hall struck twice and stopped, and at the same instant the door of the library opened slowly, and, to his amazement, he saw Mary standing beyond the threshold. She carried a candle in her hand, and by the wavering light, he saw that she was very pale and that her eyes were red as if she had been weeping.

"The lights were out. I thought you had gone upstairs," she said, with a catch in her voice.

"Do you want anything?"

"No, I couldn't sleep, so I came for a book."

With a hurried movement, she came over to the table and caught up a book without glancing at the title.

"Are you ill?" he asked. "Is anything the matter?"

"No, nothing. I am well, only I couldn't sleep."

"There is no trouble about Alan, is there? Have you quarrelled?"

"Oh, no, we haven't quarrelled." She was plainly impatient at his questioning. "Alan is all right. Really, it is nothing."

Though his affection for her was deep and strong, they had never learned to be demonstrative with each other, perhaps because they had been separated so much in childhood and early youth. It was almost with a hesitating gesture that he put out his hand now and touched her hair.

"My dear, you know you can trust me."

"Yes, I know." The words broke from her with a sob, and turning hastily away, she ran out of the room and back up the stairs.

CHAPTER II

Readjustments

In Letty's nursery the next afternoon, Blackburn came at last to know Caroline without the barrier of her professional manner. The child was playing happily with her paper dolls in one corner, and while she marched them back and forth along a miniature road of blocks, she sang under her breath a little song she had made.

Oh, my,
I'd like to fly
Very high
In the sky,
Just you and I.

"I am very cold," said Blackburn, as he entered. "Mammy Riah has promised me a cup of tea if I am good."

"You are always good, father," replied Letty politely, but she did not rise from the floor. "I'm sorry I can't stop, but Mrs. Brown is just taking her little girl to the hospital. If I were to get up the poor little thing might die on the way."

"That must not happen. Perhaps Miss Meade will entertain me?"

"I will do my best." Caroline turned from her writing and took up a half-finished sock. "If you had come an hour earlier you might have seen some of Mrs. Black-

burn's lovely clothes. She was showing us the dress she is going to wear to dinner to-night."

"You like pretty clothes." It was a careless effort to make conversation, but as he dropped into the arm-chair on the hearthrug, his face softened. There was a faint scent of violets in the air from a half-faded little bunch in Caroline's lap.

She met the question frankly. "On other people."

"Do you like nothing for yourself? You are so impersonal that I sometimes wonder if you possess a soul of your own."

"Oh, I like a great many things." Mammy Riah had brought tea, and Caroline put down her knitting and drew up to the wicker table. "I like books for instance. At The Cedars we used to read every evening. Father read aloud to us as long as he lived."

"Yet I never see you reading?"

"Not here." As she shook her head, the firelight touched her close, dark hair, which shone like satin against the starched band of her cap. Almost as white as her cap seemed her wide forehead, with the intense black eyebrows above the radiant blue of her eyes. "You see I want to finish these socks."

"I thought you were doing a muffler?"

"Oh, that's gone to France long ago! This is a fresh lot Mrs. Blackburn has promised, and Mrs. Timberlake and I are working night and day to get them finished in time. We can't do the large kind of work that Mrs. Blackburn does," she added, "so we have to make up with our little bit. Mrs. Timberlake says we are hewers of wood and drawers of water."

"You are always busy," he said, smiling. "I believe

you would be busy if you were put into solitary confinement."

To his surprise a look of pain quivered about her mouth, and he noticed, for the first time, that it was the mouth of a woman who had suffered. "It is the best way of not thinking——" She ended with a laugh, and he felt that, in spite of her kindness and her capability, she was as elusive as thistle-down.

"I can knit a little, father," broke in Letty, looking up from her dolls. "Miss Meade is teaching me to knit a muffler—only it gets narrower all the time. I'm afraid the soldiers won't want it."

"Then give it to me. I want it."

"If I give it to you, you might go to fight, and get killed." As the child turned again to her dolls, he said slowly to Caroline, "I can't imagine how she picks up ideas like that. Someone must have talked about the war before her."

"She heard Mrs. Blackburn talking about it once in the car. She must have caught words without our noticing it."

His face darkened. "One has to be careful."

"Yes, I try to remember." He was quick to observe that she was taking the blame from Angelica, and again he received an impression that she was mentally evading him. Her soul was closed like a flower; yet now and then, through her reserve and gravity, he felt a charm that was as sweet and fresh as a perfume. She was looking tired and pale, he thought, and he wondered how her still features could have kindled into the beauty he had seen in them on that snowy afternoon. It had never occurred to him before, accustomed as he was to the formal loveliness of Angelica, that the same

woman could be both plain and beautiful, both colourless and vivid.

This was perplexing him, when she clasped her hands over her knitting, and said with the manner of quiet confidence that he had grown to expect in her, "I have always meant to tell you, Mr. Blackburn, that I listened to everything you said that day on the terrace—that afternoon when you were talking to Colonel Ashburton and Mr. Sloane. I didn't mean to listen, but I found myself doing it."

"Well, I hope you are not any the worse for it, and I am sure you are not any the better."

"There is something else I want to tell you." Her pale cheeks flushed faintly, and a liquid fire shone in her eyes. "I think you are right. I agree with every word that you said."

"Traitor! What would your grandmother have thought of you? As a matter of fact I have forgotten almost all that I said, but I can safely assume that it was heretical. I think none of us intended to start that discussion. We launched into it before we knew where we were going."

Her mind was on his first sentence, and she appeared to miss his closing words. "I can't answer for my grandmother, but father would have agreed with you. He used to say that the State was an institution for the making of citizens."

"And he talked to you about such things?" It had never occurred to him that a woman could become companionable on intellectual grounds, yet while she sat there facing him, with the light on her brow and lips, and her look of distinction and remoteness as of one who has in some way been set apart from personal joy or

sorrow, he realized that she was as utterly detached as Sloane had been when he discoursed on the functions of government.

"Oh, we talked and talked on Sunday afternoons, a few neighbours, old soldiers mostly, and father and I. I wonder why political arguments still make me think of bees humming?"

He laughed with a zest she had never heard in his voice before. "And the smell of sheepmint and box!"

"I remember—and blackberry wine in blue glasses?"

"No, they were red, and there was cake cut in thin slices with icing on the top of it."

"Doesn't it bring it all back again?"

"It brings back the happiest time of my life to me. You never got up at dawn to turn the cows out to pasture, and brought them home in the evening, riding the calf?"

"No, but I've cooked breakfast by candlelight."

"You've never led a band of little darkeys across a cornfield at sunrise?"

"But I've canned a whole patch of tomatoes."

"I know you've never tasted the delight of stolen fishing in the creek under the willows?"

Her reserve had dropped from her like a mask. She looked up with a laugh that was pure music. "It is hard to believe that you ever went without things."

"Oh, things!" He made a gesture of indifference. "If you mean money—well, it may surprise you to know that it has no value for me to-day except as a means to an end."

"To how many ends?" she asked mockingly.

"The honest truth is that it wouldn't cost me a pang to give up Briarlay, every stock and stone, and go back

to the southside to dig for a living. I made it all by accident, and I may lose it all just as easily. It looks now, since the war began, as if I were losing some of it very rapidly. But have you ever noticed that people are very apt to keep the things they don't care about—that they can't shake them off? Now, what I've always wanted was the chance to do some work that counted—an opportunity for service that would help the men who come after me. As a boy I used to dream of this. In those days I preferred William Wallace to Monte Cristo."

"The opportunity may come now."

"If we go into this war—and, by God, we must go into it!—that might be. I'd give ten—no, twenty years of my life for the chance. Life! We speak of giving life, but what is life except the means of giving something infinitely better and finer? As if anything mattered but the opportunity to speak the thought in one's brain, to sing it, to build it in stone. There is a little piece of America deep down in me, and when I die I want to leave it somewhere above ground, embodied in the national consciousness. When this blessed Republic leaves the mud behind, and goes marching, clean and whole, down the ages, I want this little piece of myself to go marching with it."

So she had discovered the real Blackburn, the dreamer under the clay! This was the man Mrs. Timberlake had described to her—the man whose fate it was to appear always in the wrong and to be always in the right. And, womanlike, she wondered if this passion of the mind had drawn its strength and colour from the earlier wasted passion of his heart? Would he love America so much if he loved Angelica more? As she

drew nearer to the man's nature, she was able to surmise how terrible must have been the ruin that Angelica had wrought in his soul. That he had once loved her with all the force and swiftness of his character, Caroline understood as perfectly as she had come to understand that he now loved her no longer.

"If I can cast a shadow of the America in my mind into the sum total of American thought, I shall feel that life has been worth while," he was saying. "The only way to create a democracy,—and I see the immense future outlines of this country as the actual, not the imaginary democracy,—after all, the only way to create a thing is to think it. An act of faith isn't merely a mental process; it is a creative force that the mind releases into the world. Germany made war, not by invading Belgium, but by thinking war for forty years; and, in the same way, by thinking in terms of social justice, we may end by making a true democracy." He paused abruptly, with the glow of enthusiasm in his face, and then added slowly, in a voice that sounded curiously restrained and distant, "I must have been boring you abominably. It has been so long since I let myself go like this that I'd forgotten where I was and to whom I was talking."

It was true, she realized, without resentment; he had forgotten that she was present. Since she had little vanity, she was not hurt. It was only one of those delicious morsels that life continually offered to one's sense of humour.

"I am not quite so dull, perhaps, as you think me," she responded pleasantly. After all, though intelligence was sometimes out of place, she had discovered that pleasantness was always a serviceable quality.

At this he rose from his chair, laughing. "You must not, by the way, get a wrong impression of me. I have been talking as if money did not count, and yet there was a time when I'd willingly have given twenty years of my life for it. Money meant to me power—the kind of power one could grasp by striving and sacrifice. Why, I've walked the streets of Richmond with five cents in my pocket, and the dream of uncounted millions in my brain. When my luck turned, and it turned quickly as luck runs, I thought for a year or two that I'd got the thing that I wanted——"

"And you found out that you hadn't?"

"Oh, yes, I found out that I hadn't," he rejoined drily, as he moved toward the door, "and I've been making discoveries like that ever since. To-day I might tell you that work, not wealth, brings happiness, but I've been wrong often enough before, and who knows that I am not wrong about this." It was the tone of bitterness she had learned to watch for whenever she talked with him—the tone that she recognized as the subtle flavour of Angelica's influence. "Now I'll find Mary," he added, "and ask her if she saw the doctor this morning. The reading I heard as I came up, I suppose was for her benefit?"

"I don't know," replied Caroline, wondering if she ought to keep him from interrupting a play of Alan's. "I think Mr. Wythe had promised to read something to Mrs. Blackburn."

"Oh, well, Mary must be about, and I'll find her. She couldn't sleep last night and I thought her looking fagged."

"Yes, she hasn't been well. Mrs. Timberlake has tried to persuade her to take a tonic."

For a minute he hesitated. "There hasn't been any trouble, I hope. Anything I could straighten out?" He looked curiously young and embarrassed as he put the question.

"Nothing that I know of. I think she feels a little nervous and let-down, that's all."

The hesitation had gone now from his manner, and he appeared relieved and cheerful. "I had forgotten that you aren't the keeper of the soul as well as the body. It's amazing the way you manage Letty. She is happier than I have ever seen her." Then, as the child got up from her play and came over to him, he asked tenderly, "Aren't you happy, darling?"

"Yes, I'm happy, father," answered Letty, slowly and gravely, "but I wish mother was happy too. She was crying this morning, and so was Aunt Mary."

A wine-dark flush stained Blackburn's face, while the arms that had been about to lift Letty from the floor, dropped suddenly to his sides. The pleasure his praise had brought to Caroline faded as she watched him, and she felt vaguely disturbed and apprehensive. Was there something, after all, that she did not understand? Was there a deeper closet and a grimmer skeleton at Briarlay than the one she had discovered?

"If your mother isn't happy, Letty, you must try to make her so," he answered presently in a low voice.

"I do try, father, I try dreadfully hard, and so does Miss Meade. But I think she wants something she hasn't got," she added in a whisper, "I think she wants something so very badly that it hurts her."

"And does your Aunt Mary want something too?" Though he spoke jestingly, the red flush was still in his face.

Letty put up her arms and drew his ear down to her lips. "Oh, no, Aunt Mary cries just because mother does."

"Well, we'll see what we can do about it," he responded, as he turned away and went out of the door.

Listening attentively, Caroline heard his steps pass down the hall, descend the stairs, and stop before the door of the front drawing-room. "I wonder if Mr. Wythe is still reading," she thought; and then she went back to her unfinished letter, while Letty returned cheerfully to her play in the corner.

This is an ugly blot, mother dear, but Mr. Blackburn came in so suddenly that he startled me, and I almost upset my inkstand. He stayed quite a long time, and talked more than he had ever done to me before—mostly about politics. I have changed my opinion of him since I came here. When I first knew him I thought him wooden and hard, but the more I see of him the better I like him, and I am sure that everything we heard about him was wrong. He has an unfortunate manner at times, and he is very nervous and irritable, and little things upset him unless he keeps a tight grip on himself; but I believe that he is really kind-hearted and sincere in what he says. One thing I am positive about—there was not a word of truth in the things Mrs. Colfax wrote me before I came here. He simply adores Letty, and whatever trouble there may be between him and his wife, I do not believe that it is entirely his fault. Mrs. Timberlake says he was desperately in love with her when he married her, and I can tell, just by watching them together, how terribly she must have made him suffer. Of course, I should not say this to any one else, but I tell you everything—I have to tell you—and I know you will not read a single word of this to the girls.

I used to hope that Letty's illness would bring them

together—wouldn't that have been just the way things happen in books?—but everybody blamed him because she went to the tableaux, and, as far as I can see, she lets people think what is false, without lifting a finger to correct them. It is such a pity that she isn't as fine as we once thought her—for she looks so much like an angel that it is hard not to believe that she is good, no matter what she does. If you haven't lived in the house with her, it is impossible to see through her, and even now I am convinced that if she chose to take the trouble, she could twist everyone of us, even Mr. Blackburn, round her little finger. You remember I wrote you that Mr. Wythe did not like her? Well, she has chosen to be sweet to him of late, and now he is simply crazy about her. He reads her all his plays, and she is just as nice and sympathetic as she can be about his work. I sometimes wish Miss Blackburn would not be quite so frank and sharp in her criticism. I have heard her snap him up once or twice about something he wrote, and I am sure she hurt his feelings. One afternoon, when I took Letty down to the drawing-room to show a new dress to her mother, he was reading, and he went straight on, while we were there, and finished his play. I liked it very much, and so did Mrs. Blackburn, but Miss Blackburn really showed some temper because he would not change a line when she asked him to. It was such a pity she was unreasonable because it made her look plain and unattractive, and Mrs. Blackburn was too lovely for words. She had on a dress of grey crêpe exactly the colour of her eyes, and her hair looked softer and more golden than ever. It is the kind of hair one never has very much of—as fine and soft as Maud's—but it is the most beautiful colour and texture I ever saw.

Well, I thought that Miss Blackburn was right when she said the line was all out of character with the speaker; but Mrs. Blackburn did not agree with us, and when Mr. Wythe appealed to her, she said it was just perfect as it was, and that he must not dream of chang-

ing it. Then he said he was going to let it stand, and Miss Blackburn was so angry that she almost burst into tears. I suppose it hurt her to see how much more he valued the other's opinion; but it would be better if she could learn to hide her feelings. And all the time Mrs. Blackburn lay back in her chair, in her dove grey dress, and just smiled like a saint. You would have thought she pitied her sister-in-law, she looked at her so sweetly when she said, "Mary, dear, we mustn't let you persuade him to ruin it." You know I really began to ask myself if I had not been unjust to her in thinking that she could be a little bit mean. Then I remembered that poor old woman in Pine Street—I wrote you about her last autumn—and I knew she was being sweet because there was something she wanted to gain by it. I don't know what it is she wants, nor why she is wasting so much time on Mr. Wythe; but it is exactly as if she had bloomed out in the last month like a white rose. She takes more trouble about her clothes, and there is the loveliest glow—there isn't any word but bloom that describes it—about her skin and hair and eyes. She looks years younger than she did when I came here.

I wanted to write you about Mr. Blackburn, but his wife is so much more fascinating. Even if you do not like her, you are obliged to think about her, and even if you do not admire her, you are obliged to look at her when she is in the room. She says very little—and as she never says anything clever, I suppose this is fortunate—but somehow she just manages to draw everything to her. I suppose it is personality, but you always say that personality depends on mind and heart, and I am sure her attraction has nothing to do with either of these. It is strange, isn't it, but the whole time Mr. Blackburn was in here talking to me, I kept wondering if she had ever cared for him? Mrs. Timberlake says that she never did even when she married him, and that now she is irritated because he is having a good many financial difficulties, and they interfere

with her plans. But Mr. Blackburn seems to worry very little about money. I believe his friends think that some day he may run for the Senate—Forlorn Hope Blackburn, Colonel Ashburton calls him, though he says that he has a larger following among the Independent voters than anybody suspects. I shouldn't imagine there was the faintest chance of his election—for he has anything but an ingratiating manner with people; and so much in a political candidate depends upon a manner. You remember all the dreadful speeches that were flung about in the last Presidential elections. Well, Mr. Sloane, who was down here from New York the other day, said he really thought the result might have been different if the campaign speakers had had better manners. It seems funny that such a little thing should decide a great question, doesn't it? I suppose, when the time comes for us to go into this war or stay out of it, the decision will rest upon something so small that it will never get into history, not even between the lines. You remember that remark of Turgot's—that dear father loved to quote: "The greatest evils in life have their rise from things too small to be attended to."

After hearing Mr. Blackburn talk, I am convinced that he is perfectly honest in everything he says. As far as I can gather he believes, just as we do, that men should go into politics in order to give, not to gain, and he feels that they will give freely of themselves only to something they love, or to some ideal that is like a religion to them. He says the great need is to love America—that we have not loved, we have merely exploited, and he thinks that as long as the sections remain distinct from the nation, and each man thinks first of his own place, the nation will be exploited for the sake of the sections. He says, too, and this sounds like father, that the South is just as much the nation as the North or the West, and that it is the duty of the South to do her share in the building of the future. I know this is put badly, but you will understand what I mean.

Now, I really must stop. Oh, I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Blackburn wants to know if you could find time to do some knitting for her? She says she will furnish all the wool you need, and she hopes you will make socks instead of mufflers. I told her you knitted the most beautiful socks.

I am always thinking of you and wondering about The Cedars.

Your loving,

CAROLINE.

It looks very much as if we were going to fight, doesn't it? Has the President been waiting for the country, or the country for the President?

CHAPTER III

Man's Woman

From the second drawing-room, where Angelica had tea every afternoon, there drifted the fragrance of burning cedar, and as Blackburn walked quickly toward the glow of the fire, he saw his wife in her favourite chair with deep wings, and Alan Wythe stretched languidly on the white fur rug at her feet. Mary was not there. She had evidently just finished tea, for her riding-crop lay on a chair by the door; but when Blackburn called her name, Alan stopped his reading and replied in his pleasant voice, "I think she has gone out to the stable. William came to tell her that one of the horses had a cough."

"Then I'll find her. She seems out of sorts, and I'm trying to make her see the doctor."

"I am sorry for that." Laying aside the book, Alan sprang to his feet, and stood gazing anxiously into the other's face. "She always appears so strong that one comes to take her fitness as a matter of course."

"Yes, I never saw her look badly until the last day or two. Have you noticed it, Angelica?"

Without replying to his question, Angelica rested her head against the pink velvet cushion, and turned a gentle, uncomprehending stare on his face. It was her most disconcerting expression, for in the soft blankness and immobility of her look, he read a rebuke which she was either too amiable or too well-bred to

utter. He wondered what he had done that was wrong, and, in the very instant of wondering, he felt himself grow confused and angry and aggressive. This was always the effect of her stare and her silence—for nature had provided her with an invincible weapon in her mere lack of volubility—and when she used it as deliberately as she did now, she could, without speaking a syllable, goad him to the very limit of his endurance. It was as if her delicate hands played on his nerves and evoked an emotional discord.

"Have you noticed that Mary is not well?" he asked sharply, and while he spoke, he became aware that Alan's face had lost its friendliness.

"No, I had not noticed it." Her voice dropped as softly as liquid honey from her lips. "I thought her looking very well and cheerful at tea." She spoke without movement or gesture; but the patient and resigned droop of her figure, the sad grey eyes, and the hurt quiver of her eyelashes, implied the reproach she had been too gentle to put into words. The contrast with her meekness made him appear rough and harsh; yet the knowledge of this, instead of softening him, only increased his sense of humiliation and bitterness.

"Perhaps, then, there is no need of my speaking to her?" he said.

"It might please her." She was sympathetic now about Mary. "I am sure that she would like to know how anxious you are."

For the first time since he had entered the room she was smiling, and this slow, rare smile threw a golden radiance over her features. He thought, as Caroline had done several afternoons ago, that her beauty, which had grown a little dim and pale during the autumn,

had come back with an April colour and freshness. Not only her hair and eyes, but the ivory tint of her skin seemed to shine with a new lustre, as if from some hidden fire that was burning within. For a minute the old appeal to his senses returned, and he felt again the beat and quiver of his pulses which her presence used to arouse. Then his mind won the victory, and the emotion faded to ashes before its warmth had passed to his heart.

"I'll go and find her," he said again, with the awkwardness he always showed when he was with her.

Her smile vanished, and she leaned forward with an entreating gesture, which flowed through all the slender, exquisite lines of her body. Instinctively he knew that she had not finished with him yet; that she was not ready to let him go until he had served some inscrutable purpose which she had had in view from the beginning. His mind was not trained to recognize subtleties of intention or thought; and while he waited for her to reveal herself, he began wondering what she could possibly want with him now? Clearly it was all part of some intricate scheme; yet it appeared incredible to his blunter perceptions that she should exhaust the resources of her intelligence merely for the empty satisfaction of impressing Mary's lover.

"David," she began in a pleading tone, "aren't you going to have tea with me?"

"I had it upstairs." He was baffled and at bay before an attack which he could not understand.

"In the nursery?" Her voice trembled slightly.

"Yes, in the nursery." As if she had ever expected or desired him to interrupt her amusements!

"Was Cousin Matty up there?" Though he was still

unable to define her motive, his ears detected the faint note of suspense that ruffled the thin, clear quality of her voice.

"No, only Letty and Miss Meade."

A tremor crossed her face, as if he had struck her; then she said, not reproachfully, but with a pathetic air of self-effacement and humility, "Miss Meade is very intelligent. I am so glad you have found someone you like to talk to. I know I am dull about politics." And her eyes added wistfully, "It isn't my fault that I am not so clever."

"Yes, she is intelligent," he answered drily; and then, still mystified and dully resentful because he could not understand, he turned and went out as abruptly as he had entered.

While his footsteps passed through the long front drawing-room and across the hall, Angelica remained motionless, with her head bent a little sadly, as if she were listening to the echo of some half-forgotten sorrow. Then, sighing gently, she looked from Alan into the fire, and reluctantly back at Alan again. She seemed impulsively, against her will and her conscience, to turn to him for understanding and sympathy; and at the sight of her unspoken appeal, he threw himself on the rug at her feet, and exclaimed in a strangled voice,

"You are unhappy!" With these three words, into which he seemed to put infinity, he had broken down the walls of reticence that divide human souls from each other. She was unhappy! Before this one torrential discovery all the restraints of habit and tradition, of conscience and honour, vanished like the imperfect structures of man in the rage of the hurricane.

She shivered, and looked at him with a long fright-

ened gaze. There was no rebellion, there was only a passive sadness in her face. She was too weak, her eyes said, to contend with unhappiness. Some stronger hands than hers must snatch her from her doom if she were to be rescued.

"How can I be happy?" The words were wrung slowly from her lips. "You see how it is?"

"Yes, I see." He honestly imagined that he did. "I see it all, and it makes me desperate. It is unbelievable that any one should make you suffer."

She shook her head and answered in a whisper, "It is partly my fault. Whatever happens, I always try to remember that, and be just. The first mistake may have been mine."

"Yours?" he exclaimed passionately, and then dropping his face into his hands, "If only I were not powerless to protect you!"

For a moment, after his smothered cry, she said nothing. Then, with an exquisite gesture of renunciation, she put the world and its temptations away from her. "We are both powerless," she responded firmly, "and now you must read me the rest of your play, or I shall be obliged to send you home."

Blackburn, meanwhile, had stopped outside on his way to the stable, and stood looking across the garden for some faint prospect of a clearer to-morrow. Overhead the winter sky was dull and leaden; but in the west a thin silver line edged the horizon, and his gaze hung on this thread of light, as if it were prophetic not only of sunshine, but of happiness. Already he was blaming himself for the scene with Angelica; already he was resolving to make a stronger effort at reconciliation and understanding, to win her back in spite of herself, to be

patient, sympathetic, and generous, rather than just, in his judgment of her. In his more philosophical moments he beheld her less as the vehicle of personal disenchantment, than as the unfortunate victim of a false system, of a ruinous upbringing. She had been taught to grasp until grasping had become not so much a habit of gesture, as a reflex movement of soul—an involuntary reaction to the nerve stimulus of her surroundings.

Though he had learned that the sight of any object she did not own immediately awoke in her the instinct of possession, he still told himself, in hours of tolerance, that this weakness of nature was the result of early poverty and lack of mental discipline, and that disappointment with material things would develop her character as inevitably as it would destroy her physical charm. So far, he was obliged to admit, she had risen superior to any disillusionment from possession, with the ironic exception of that brief moment when she had possessed his adoration; yet, in spite of innumerable failures, it was characteristic of the man that he should cling stubbornly to his belief in some secret inherent virtue in her nature, as he had clung, when love failed him, to the frail sentiments of habit and association. The richness of her beauty had blinded him for so long to the poverty of her heart, that, even to-day, bruised and humiliated as he was, he found himself suddenly hoping that she might some day change miraculously into the woman he had believed her to be. The old half-forgotten yearning for her swept over him while he thought of her, the yearning to kneel at her feet, to kiss her hands, to lift his eyes and see her bending like an angel above him. And in his thoughts she came back to him, not as she was in reality, but as he longed for her

to be. With one of those delusive impersonations of memory, which torment the heart after the mind has rejected them, she came back to him with her hands outstretched to bless, not to grasp, and a look of goodness and love in her face.

He remembered his first meeting with her—the close, over-heated rooms, the empty faces, the loud, triumphant music; and then suddenly she had bloomed there, like a white flower, in the midst of all that was ineffectual and meaningless. One minute he had been lonely, tired, depressed, and the next he was rested and happy and full of wild, startled dreams of the future. She had been girlish and shy and just a little aloof—all the feminine graces adorned her—and he had surrendered in the traditional masculine way. Afterwards he discovered that she had intended from the first instant to marry him; but on that evening he had seen only her faint, reluctant flight from his rising emotion. She had played the game so well; she had used the ancient decoy so cleverly, that it had taken years to tear the veil of illusion from the bare structure of method. For he knew now that she had been methodical, that she had been utterly unemotional; and that her angelic virtue had been mere thinness of temperament. Never for a moment had she been real, never had she been natural; and he admitted, in the passing mood of confession, that if she had once been natural—as natural as the woman upstairs—the chances were that she would never have won him. Manlike, he would have turned from the blade-straight nature to pursue the beckoning angel of the faint reluctance. If she had stooped but for an instant, if she had given him so much as the touch of her fingers, she might have lost

him. Life, not instinct, had taught him the beauty of sincerity in woman, the grace of generosity. In his youth, it was woman as mystery, woman as destroyer, to whom he had surrendered.

Descending the steps from the terrace, he walked slowly along the brick way to the stable, where he found Mary giving medicine to her favourite horse.

"Briar Rose has a bad cough, David."

He asked a few questions, and then, when the dose was administered, they turned together, and strolled back through the garden. Mary looked cross and anxious, and he could tell by the way she spoke in short jerks that her nerves were not steady. Her tone of chaffing had lost its ease, and the effort she made to appear flippant seemed to hurt her.

"Are you all right again, Mary?"

"Quite all right. Why shouldn't I be?"

"There's no reason that I know of," he replied seriously. "Have you decided when you will be married?"

She winced as if he had touched a nerve. "No, we haven't decided." For a minute she walked on quickly, then looking up with a defiant smile, she said, "I am not sure that we are ever going to be married."

So the trouble was out at last! He breathed heavily, overcome by some indefinable dread. After all, why should Mary's words have disturbed him so deeply? The chances were, he told himself, that it was nothing more than the usual lovers' quarrel.

"My dear, Alan is a good fellow. Don't let anything make trouble between you."

"Oh, I know he is a good fellow—only—only I am not sure we—we should be happy together. I don't

care about books, and he doesn't care any longer for horses——"

"As if these things mattered! You've got the fundamental thing, haven't you?"

"The fundamental thing?" She was deliberately evading him—she, the straightforward Mary!

"I mean, of course, that you care for each other."

At this she broke down, and threw out her hands with a gesture of despair. "I don't know. I used to think so, but I don't know any longer," she answered, and fled from him into the house.

As he looked after her he felt the obscure doubt struggling again in his mind, and with it there returned the minor problem of his financial difficulties, and the conversation he must sooner or later have with Angelica. Nothing in his acquaintance with Angelica had surprised him more than the discovery that, except in the embellishment of her own attractions, she could be not only prudent, but stingy. Even her extravagance—if a habit of spending that exacted an adequate return for every dollar could be called extravagance—was cautious and cold like her temperament, as if Nature had decreed that she should possess no single attribute of soul in abundance. No impulse had ever swept her away, not even the impulse to grasp. She had always calculated, always schemed with her mind, not her senses, always moved slowly and deliberately toward her purpose. She would never speak the truth, he knew, just as she would never over-step a convention, because truthfulness and unconventionality would have interfered equally with the success of her designs. Life had become for her only a pedestal which supported an image; and this image, as unlike the actual Angelica as a Christmas angel is unlike

a human being, was reflected, in all its tinselled glory, in the minds of her neighbours. Before the world she would be always blameless, wronged, and forgiving. He knew these things with his mind, yet there were moments even now when his heart still desired her.

An hour later, when he entered her sitting-room, he found her, in a blue robe, on the sofa in front of the fire. Of late he had noticed that she seldom lay down in the afternoon, and as she was not a woman of moods, he was surprised that she had broken so easily through a habit which had become as fixed as a religious observance.

"It doesn't look as if you had had much rest to-day," he said, as he entered.

She looked up with an expression that struck him as incongruously triumphant. Though at another time he would have accepted this as an auspicious omen, he wondered now, after the episode of the afternoon, if she were merely gathering her forces for a fresh attack. He shrank from approaching her on the subject of economy, because experience had taught him that her first idea of saving would be to cut down the wages of the servants; and he had a disturbing recollection that she had met his last suggestion that they should reduce expenses with a reminder that it was unnecessary to employ a trained nurse to look after Letty. When she wanted to strike hardest, she invariably struck through the child. Though she was not clever, she had been sharp enough to discover the chink in his armour.

"Did you find Mary?" she asked.

"Yes, she seems out of sorts. What is the trouble between her and Alan?"

"Is there any trouble?" She appeared surprised.

"I fear so. She told me she was not sure that they were going to be married."

"Did she say that?"

"She said it, but she may not have meant it. I cannot understand."

Angelica pondered his words. "Well, I've noticed lately that she wasn't very nice to him."

"But she was wildly in love with him. She cannot have changed so suddenly."

"Why not?" She raised her eyebrows slightly. "People do change, don't they?"

"Not when they are like Mary." With a gesture of perplexity, he put the subject away from him. "What I really came to tell you isn't very much better," he said. "Of late, since the war began, things have been going rather badly with me. I dare say I'll manage to pull up sooner or later, but every interest in which I am heavily involved has been more or less affected by the condition of the country. If we should go into this war——"

She looked up sharply. "Don't you think we can manage to keep out of it?"

"To keep out of it?" Even now there were moments when she astonished him.

For the first time in months her impatience got the better of her. "Oh, I know, of course, that you would like us to fight Germany; but it seems to me that if you stopped to think of all the suffering it would mean——"

"I do stop to think."

"Then there isn't any use talking!"

"Not about that; but considering the uncertainty of the immediate future, don't you think we might try, in some way, to cut down a bit?"

Turning away from him, she gazed thoughtfully into the fire. "If it is really necessary——?"

"It may become necessary at any moment."

At this she looked straight up at him. "Well, since Letty is so much better, I am sure that there is no need for us to keep a trained nurse for her."

She had aimed squarely, and he flinched at the blow. "But the child is so happy."

"She would be just as happy with any one else."

"No other nurse has ever done so much for her. Why, she has been like a different child since Miss Meade came to her."

While he spoke he became aware that she was looking at him as she had looked in the drawing-room.

"Then you refuse positively to let me send Miss Meade away?"

"I refuse positively, once and for all."

Her blank, uncomprehending stare followed him as he turned and went out of the room.

CHAPTER IV

The Martyr

A fortnight later light was thrown on Blackburn's perplexity by a shrewd question from Mrs. Timberlake. For days he had been groping in darkness, and now, in one instant, it seemed to him that his discovery leaped out in a veritable blaze of electricity. How could he have gone on in ignorance? How could he have stumbled, with unseeing eyes, over the heart of the problem?

"David," said the housekeeper bluntly, "don't you think that this thing has been going on long enough?" They were in the library, and before putting the question, she had closed the door and even glanced suspiciously at the windows.

"This thing?" He looked up from his newspaper, with the vague idea that she was about to discourse upon our diplomatic correspondence with Germany.

"I am not talking about the President's notes." Her voice had grown rasping. "He may write as many as he pleases, if they will make the Germans behave themselves without our having to go to war. What I mean is the way Mary is eating her heart out. Haven't you noticed it?"

"I have been worried about her for some time." He laid the paper down on the desk. "But I haven't been able to discover what is the matter."

"If you had asked me two months ago, I could have told you it was about that young fool Alan."

"About Wythe? Why, I thought she and Wythe were particularly devoted." If he were sparring for time, there was no hint of it in his manner. It really looked, the housekeeper told herself grimly, as if he had not seen the thing that was directly before his eyes until she had pointed it out to him.

"They were," she answered tartly, "at one time."

"Well, what is the trouble now? A lovers' quarrel?"

It was a guiding principle with Mrs. Timberlake that when her conscience drove her she never looked at her road; and true to this intemperate practice, she plunged now straight ahead. "The trouble is that Alan has been making a fool of himself over Angelica." It was the first time that she had implied the faintest criticism of his wife, and as soon as she had uttered the words, her courage evaporated, and she relapsed into her attitude of caustic reticence. Even her figure, in its rusty black, looked shrunken and huddled.

"So that is it!" His voice was careless and indifferent. "You mean he has been flattered because she has let him read his plays to her?"

"He hasn't known when to stop. If something isn't done, he will go on reading them for ever."

"Well, if Angelica enjoys them?"

"But it makes Mary very unhappy. Can't you see that she is breaking her heart over it?"

"Angelica doesn't know." He might have been stating a fact about one of the belligerent nations.

"Oh, of course." She grasped at the impersonal note, but it escaped her. "If she only knew, she could so easily stop it."

"So you think if someone were to mention it?"

"That is why I came to you. I thought you might manage to drop a word that would let Angelica see how much it is hurting Mary. She wouldn't want to hurt Mary just for the sake of a little amusement. The plays can't be so very important, or they would be on the stage, wouldn't they?"

"Could you tell her, do you think?" It was the first time he had ever attempted to evade a disagreeable duty, and the question surprised her.

"Angelica wouldn't listen to a word I said. She'd just think I'd made it up, and I reckon it does look like a tempest in a teapot."

He met this gravely. "Well, it is natural that she shouldn't take a thing like that seriously."

"Yes, it's natural." She conceded the point ungrudgingly. "I believe Angelica would die before she would do anything really wrong."

If he accepted this in silence, it was not because the tribute to Angelica's character appeared to him to constitute an unanswerable argument. During the weeks when he had been groping his way to firmer ground, he had passed beyond the mental boundaries in which Angelica and her standards wore any longer the aspect of truth. He knew them to be not only artificial, but false; and Mrs. Timberlake's praise was scarcely more than a hollow echo from the world that he had left. That Angelica, who would lie and cheat for an advantage, could be held, through mere coldness of nature, to be above "doing anything really wrong," was a fallacy which had once deluded his heart, but failed now to convince his intelligence. Once he had believed in the sacred myth of her virtue; now, brought close against

the deeper realities, he saw that her virtue was only a negation, and that true goodness must be, above all things, an affirmation of spirit.

"I'll see what I can do," he said, and wondered why the words had not worn threadbare.

"You mean you'll speak to Angelica?" Her relief rasped his nerves.

"Yes, I'll speak to Angelica."

"Don't you think it would be better to talk first to Mary?"

Before replying, he thought over this carefully. "Perhaps it would be better. Will you tell her that I'd like to see her immediately?"

She nodded and went out quickly, and it seemed to him that the door had barely closed before it opened again, and Mary came in with a brave step and a manner of unnatural alertness and buoyancy.

"David, do you really think we are going to have war?" It was an awkward evasion, but she had not learned either to evade or equivocate gracefully.

"I think we are about to break off diplomatic relations——"

"And that means war, doesn't it?"

"Who knows?" He made a gesture of impatience. "You are trying to climb up on the knees of the gods."

"I want to go," she replied breathlessly, "whether we have war or not, I want to go to France. Will you help me?"

"Of course I will help you."

"I mean will you give me money?"

"I will give you anything I've got. It isn't so much as it used to be."

"It will be enough for me. I want to go at once—next week—to-morrow.'

He looked at her attentively, his grave, lucid eyes ranging thoughtfully over her strong, plain face, which had grown pale and haggard, over her boyish figure, which had grown thin and wasted.

"Mary," he said suddenly, "what is the trouble? Is it an honest desire for service or is it—the open door?"

For a minute she looked at him with frightened eyes; then breaking down utterly, she buried her face in her hands and turned from him. "Oh, David, I must get away! I cannot live unless I get away!"

"From Briarlay?"

"From Briarlay, but most of all—oh, most of all," she brought this out with passion, "from Alan!"

"Then you no longer care for him?"

Instead of answering his question, she dashed the tears from her eyes, and threw back her head with a gesture that reminded him of the old boyish Mary. "Will you let me go, David?"

"Not until you have told me the truth."

"But what is the truth?" She cried out, with sudden anger. "Do you suppose I am the kind of woman to talk of a man's being 'taken away,' as if he were a loaf of bread to be handed from one woman to another? If he had ever been what I believed him, do you imagine that any one could have 'taken' him? Is there any man on earth who could have taken me from Alan?"

"What has made the trouble, Mary?" He put the question very slowly, as if he were weighing every word that he uttered.

She flung the pretense aside as bravely as she had

dashed the tears from her eyes. "Of course I have known all along that she was only flirting—that she was only playing the game——"

"Then you think that the young fool has been taking Angelica too seriously?"

At this her anger flashed out again. "Seriously enough to make me break my engagement!"

"All because he likes to read his plays to her?"

"All because he imagines her to be misunderstood and unhappy and ill-treated. Oh, David, will you never wake up? How much longer are you going to walk about the world in your sleep? No one has said a breath against Angelica—no one ever will—she isn't that kind. But unless you wish Alan to be ruined, you must send him away."

"Isn't she the one to send him away?"

"Then go to her. Go to her now, and tell her that she must do it to-day."

"Yes, I will tell her that." Even while he spoke the words which would have once wrung his heart, he was visited by that strange flashing sense of unreality, of the insignificance and transitoriness of Angelica's existence. Like Mrs. Timberlake's antiquated standards of virtue, she belonged to a world which might vanish while he watched it and leave him still surrounded by the substantial structure of life.

"Then tell her now. I hear her in the hall," said Mary brusquely, as she turned away.

"It is not likely that she will come in here," he answered, but the words were scarcely spoken before Angelica's silvery tones floated to them.

"David, may I come in? I have news for you." An instant later, as Mary went out, with her air of ar-

rogant sincerity, a triumphant figure in grey velvet passed her in the doorway.

"I saw Robert and Cousin Charles a moment ago, and they told me that we had really broken off relations with Germany——"

She had not meant to linger over the news, but while she was speaking, he crossed the room and closed the door gently behind her.

"Don't you think now we have done all that is necessary?" she demanded triumphantly. "Cousin Charles says we have vindicated our honour at last."

Blackburn smiled slightly. The sense of unreality, which had been vague and fugitive a moment before, rolled over and enveloped him. "It is rather like refusing to bow to a man who has murdered one's wife."

A frown clouded her face. "Oh, I know all you men are hoping for war, even Alan, and you would think an artist would see things differently."

"Do you think Alan is hoping for it?"

"Aren't you every one except Cousin Charles? Robert told me just now that Virginia is beginning to boil over. He believes the country will force the President's hand. Oh, I wonder if the world will ever be sane and safe again?"

He was watching her so closely that he appeared to be drinking in the sound of her voice and the sight of her loveliness; yet never for an instant did he lose the feeling that she was as ephemeral as a tinted cloud or a perfume.

"Angelica," he said abruptly, "Mary has just told me that she has broken her engagement to Alan."

Tiny sparks leaped to her eyes. "Well, I suppose they wouldn't have been happy together——"

"Do you know why she did it?"

"Do I know why?" She looked at him inquiringly. "How could I know? She has not told me."

"Has Alan said anything to you about it?"

"Why, yes, he told me that she had broken it."

"And did he tell you why?"

She was becoming irritated by the cross examination. "No, why should he tell me? It is their affair, isn't it? Now, if that is all, I must go. Alan has brought the first act of a new play, and he wants my opinion."

The finishing thrust was like her, for she could be bold enough when she was sure of her weapons. Even now, though he knew her selfishness, it was incredible to him that she should be capable of destroying Mary's happiness when she could gain nothing by doing it. Of course if there were some advantage——

"Alan can wait," he said bluntly. "Angelica, can't you see that this has gone too far, this nonsense of Alan's?"

"This nonsense?" She raised her eyebrows. "Do you call his plays nonsense?"

"I call his plays humbug. What must stop is his folly about you. When Mary goes, you must send him away."

Her smile was like the sharp edge of a knife. "So it is Alan now? It was poor Roane only yesterday."

"It is poor Roane to-day as much as it ever was. But Alan must stop coming here."

"And why, if I may ask?"

"You cannot have understood, or you would have stopped it."

"I should have stopped what?"

He met her squarely. "Alan's infatuation—for he is infatuated, isn't he?"

"Do you mean with me?" Her indignant surprise almost convinced him of her ignorance. "Who has told you that?"

She was holding a muff of silver fox, and she gazed down at it, stroking the fur gently, while she waited for him to answer. He noticed that her long slender fingers—she had the hand as well as the figure of one of Botticelli's Graces—were perfectly steady.

"That was the reason that Mary broke her engagement," he responded.

"Did she tell you that?"

"Yes, she told me. She said she knew that you had not meant it—that Alan had lost his head——"

Her voice broke in suddenly with a gasp of outraged amazement. "And you ask me to send Alan away because you are jealous? You ask me this—after—after——" Her attitude of indignant virtue was so impressive that, for a moment, he found himself wondering if he had wronged her—if he had actually misunderstood and neglected her?

"You must see for yourself, Angelica, that this cannot go on."

"You dare to turn on me like this!" She cried out so clearly that he started and looked at the door in apprehension. "You dare to accuse me of ruining Mary's happiness—after all I have suffered—after all I have stood from you——"

As her voice rose in its piercing sweetness, it occurred to him for the first time that she might wish to be overheard, that she might be making this scene less for his personal benefit than for its effect upon an invisible

audience. It was the only time he had ever known her to sacrifice her inherent fastidiousness, and descend to vulgar methods of warfare, and he was keen enough to infer that the prize must be tremendous to compensate for so evident a humiliation.

"I accuse you of nothing," he said, lowering his tone in the effort to reduce hers to a conversational level. "For your own sake, I ask you to be careful."

But he had unchained the lightning, and it flashed out to destroy him. "You dare to say this to me—you who refused to send Miss Meade away though I begged you to——"

"To send Miss Meade away?" The attack was so unexpected that he wavered before it. "What has Miss Meade to do with it?"

"You refused to send her away. You positively refused when I asked you."

"Yes, I refused. But Miss Meade is Letty's nurse. What has she to do with Mary and Alan?"

"Oh, are you still trying to deceive me?" For an instant he thought she was going to burst into tears. "You knew you were spending too much time in the nursery—that you went when Cousin Matty was not there—Alan heard you admit it—you knew that I wanted to stop it, and you refused—you insisted——"

But his anger had overpowered him now, and he caught her arm roughly in a passionate desire to silence the hideous sound of her words, to thrust back the horror that she was spreading on the air—out into the world and the daylight.

"Stop, Angelica, or——"

Suddenly, without warning, she shrieked aloud, a shriek that seemed to his ears to pierce, not only the

ceiling, but the very roof of the house. As he stood there, still helplessly holding her arm, which had grown limp in his grasp, he became aware that the door opened quickly and Alan came into the room.

"I heard a cry—I thought——"

Angelica's eyes were closed, but at the sound of Alan's voice, she raised her lids and looked at him with a frightened and pleading gaze.

"I cried out. I am sorry," she said meekly. Without glancing at Blackburn, she straightened herself, and walked, with short, wavering steps, out of the room.

For a minute the two men faced each other in silence; then Alan made an impetuous gesture of indignation and followed Angelica.

CHAPTER V

The Choice

"Looks as if we were going to war, Blackburn." It was the beginning of April, and Robert Colfax had stopped on the steps of his club.

"It has looked that way for the last thirty-two months."

"Well, beware the anger—or isn't it the fury?—of the patient man. It has to come at last. We've been growling too long not to spring—and my only regret is that, as long as we're going to war, we didn't go soon enough to get into the fight. I'd like to have had a chance at potting a German. Every man in town is feeling like that to-day."

"You think it will be over before we get an army to France?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. It will be nothing more than a paper war to a finish."

A good many Virginians were thinking that way. Blackburn was not sure that he hadn't thought that way himself for the last two or three months. Everywhere he heard regrets that it was too late to have a share in the actual whipping of Germany—that we were only going to fight a decorous and inglorious war on paper. Suddenly, in a night, as it were, the war spirit in Virginia had flared out. There was not the emotional blaze—the flaming heat—older men said—of the Confederacy; but there was an ever-burning, insistent deter-

mination to destroy the roots of this evil black flower of Prussian autocracy. There was no hatred of Austria —little even of Turkey. The Prussian spirit was the foe of America and of the world; and it was against the Prussian spirit that the militant soul of Virginia was springing to arms. Men who had talked peace a few months before—who had commended the nation that was "too proud to fight," who had voted for the President because of the slogan "he kept us out of war"—had now swung round dramatically with the *volte-face* of the Government. The President had at last committed himself to a war policy, and all over the world Americans were awaiting the great word from Congress. In an hour personal interests had dissolved into an impersonal passion of service. In an hour opposing currents of thought had flowed into a single dominant purpose, and the President, who had once stood for a party, stood now for America.

For, in a broader vision, the spirit of Virginia was the spirit of all America. There were many, it is true, who had not, in the current phrase, begun to realize what war would mean to them; there were many who still doubted, or were indifferent, because the battle had not been fought at their doorstep; but as a whole the country stood determined, quiet, armed in righteousness, and waited for the great word from Congress.

And over the whole country, from North to South, from East to West, the one question never asked was, "What will America get out of it when it is over?"

"By Jove, if we do get into any actual fighting, I mean to go," said Robert, "I am not yet thirty."

Blackburn looked at him enviously. "It's rotten on

us middle-aged fellows. Isn't there a hole of some sort a man of forty-three can stop up?"

"Of course they've come to more than that in England."

"We may come to it here if the war keeps up—but that isn't likely."

"No, that isn't likely unless Congress dies talking. Why, for God's sake, can't we strangle the pacifists for once? Nobody would grieve for them."

"Oh, if liberty isn't for fools, it isn't liberty. I suppose the supreme test of our civilization, is that we let people go on talking when we don't agree with them."

It was, in reality, only a few days that Congress was taking to define and emphasize the President's policy, but these days were interminable to a nation that waited. Talk was ruining the country, people said. Thirty-two months of talking were enough even for an American Congress. It was as much as a man's reputation was worth to vote against the war; it was more than it was worth to give his reasons for so voting. There was tension everywhere, yet there was a strange muffled quiet—the quiet before the storm.

"We are too late for the fun," said Robert. "Germany will back down as soon as she sees we are in earnest." This was what every one was saying, and Blackburn heard it again when he left Colfax and went into the club.

"The pity is we shan't have time to get a man over to France. It's all up to the navy."

"The British navy, you mean? Where'd we be now but for the British navy?"

"Well, thank God, the note writing is over!"

There was determination enough; but the older men were right—there was none of the flame and ardour of secession days. The war was realized vaguely as a principle rather than as a fact. It was the difference between fighting for abstract justice and knocking down a man in hot blood because he has affronted one's wife. The will to strike was all there, only one did not see red when one delivered the blow. Righteous indignation, not personal rage, was in the mind of America.

"We aren't mad yet," remarked an old Confederate soldier to Blackburn. "Just wait till they get us as mad as we were at Manassas, and we'll show the Germans!"

"You mean wait until they drop bombs on New York instead of London?"

"Good Lord, no. Just wait until our boys have seen, not read, about the things they are doing."

So there were a few who expected an American army to reach France before the end of the war.

"Never mind about taxes. We must whip the Huns, and we can afford to pay the bills!"

For here as elsewhere the one question never asked was, "What are we going to get out of it?"

Prosperity was after all a secondary interest. Underneath was the permanent idealism of the American mind.

When Blackburn reached Briarlay, he found Letty and Caroline walking under the budding trees in the lane, and stopping his car, he got out and strolled slowly back with them to the house. The shimmer and fragrance of spring was in the air, and on the ground crowds of golden crocuses were unfolding.

"Father, will you go to war if Uncle Roane does?" asked Letty, as she slipped her hand into Blackburn's

and looked up, with her thoughtful child's eyes, into his face. "Uncle Roane says he is going to whip the Germans for me."

"I'll go, if they'll take me, Letty. Your Uncle Roane is ten years younger than I am." At the moment the war appeared to him, as it had appeared to Mary, as the open door—the way of escape from an intolerable situation; but he put this idea resolutely out of his mind. There was a moral cowardice in using impersonal issues as an excuse for the evasion of personal responsibility.

"But you could fight better than he could, father."

"I am inclined to agree with you. Perhaps the Government will think that way soon."

"Alan is going, too. Mother begged him not to, but he said he just had to go. Mammy Riah says the feeling is in his bones, and he can't help it. When a feeling gets into your bones you have to do what it tells you."

"It looks as if Mammy Riah knew something about it."

"But if you go and Alan goes and Uncle Roane goes, what will become of mother?"

"You will have to take care of her, Letty, you and Miss Meade."

Caroline, who had been walking in silence on the other side of the road, turned her head at the words. She was wearing a blue serge suit and a close-fitting hat of blue straw, and her eyes were as fresh and spring-like as the April sky.

"There is no doubt about war, is there?" she asked.

"It may come at any hour. Whether it will mean an American army in France or not, no one can say; but we shall have to furnish munitions, if not men, as fast as we can turn them out."

"Mr. Peyton said this morning it would be impossible to send men because we hadn't the ships."

Blackburn laughed. "Then, if necessary, we will do the impossible." It was the voice of America. Everywhere at that hour men were saying, "We will do the impossible."

"I should like to go," said Caroline. "I should like above all things to go."

They had stopped in the road, and still holding Letty's hand, he looked over her head at Caroline's face. "Miss Meade, will you make me a promise?"

Clear and radiant and earnest, her eyes held his gaze. "Unconditionally?"

"No, the conditions I leave to you. Will you promise?"

"I will promise." She had not lowered her eyes, and he had not looked away from her. Her face was pale, and in the fading sunlight he could see the little blue veins on her temples and the look of stern sweetness that sorrow had chiselled about her mouth. More than ever it seemed to him the face of a strong and fervent spirit rather than the face of a woman. So elusive was her beauty that he could say of no single feature, except her eyes, "Her charm lies here—or here——" yet the impression she gave him was one of magical loveliness. There was, he thought, a touch of the divine in her smile, as if her look drew its radiance from an inexhaustible source.

"Will you promise me," he said, "that whatever happens, as long as it is possible, you will stay with Letty?"

She waited a moment before she answered him, and he knew from her face that his words had touched the

depths of her heart. "I promise you that for Letty's sake I will do the impossible," she answered.

She gave him her hand, and he clasped it over the head of the child. It was one of those rare moments of perfect understanding and sympathy—of a mental harmony beside which all emotional rapture appears trivial and commonplace. He was aware of no appeal to his senses—life had taught him the futility of all purely physical charm—and the hand that touched Caroline's was as gentle and as firm as it had been when it rested on Letty's head. Here was a woman who had met life and conquered it, who could be trusted, he felt, to fight to the death to keep her spirit inviolate.

"Only one thing will take me away from Letty," she said. "If we send an army and the country calls me."

"That one thing is the only thing?"

"The only thing unless," she laughed as if she were suggesting an incredible event, "unless you or Mrs. Blackburn should send me away!"

To her surprise the ridiculous jest confused him. "Take care of Letty," he responded quickly; and then, as they reached the porch, he dropped the child's hand, and went up the steps and into the house.

In the library, by one of the windows which looked out on the terrace and the sunset, Colonel Ashburton was reading the afternoon paper, and as Blackburn entered, he rose and came over to the fireplace.

"I was a little ahead of you, so I made myself at home, as you see," he observed, with his manner of antiquated formality. In the dim light his hair made a silvery halo above his blanched features, and it occurred to Black-

burn that he had never seen him look quite so distinguished and detached from his age.

"If I'd known you were coming, I should have arranged to get here earlier."

"I didn't know it myself until it was too late to telephone you at the works." There was an unnatural constraint in his voice, and from the moment of his entrance, Blackburn had surmised that the Colonel's visit was not a casual one. The war news might have brought him; but it was not likely that he would have found the war news either disconcerting or embarrassing.

"The news is good, isn't it?" inquired Blackburn, a little stiffly, because he could think of nothing else to say.

"First rate. There isn't a doubt but we'll whip the Germans before autumn. It wasn't about the war, however, that I came."

"There is something else then?"

Before he replied Colonel Ashburton looked up gravely at the portrait of Blackburn's mother which hung over the mantelpiece. "Very like her, very like her," he remarked. "She was a few years older than I—but I'm getting on now—I'm getting on. That's the worst of being born between great issues. I was too young for the last war—just managed to be in one big battle before Lee surrendered—and I'm too old for this one. A peace Colonel doesn't amount to much, does he?" Then he looked sharply at Blackburn. "David," he asked in a curiously inanimate voice, "have you heard the things people are saying about you?"

"I have heard nothing except what has been said to my face."

"Then I may assume that the worst is still to be told you?"

"You may safely assume that, I think."

Again the Colonel's eyes were lifted to the portrait of Blackburn's mother. "There must be an answer to a thing like this, David," he said slowly. "There must be something that you can say."

"Tell me what is said."

Shaking the silvery hair from his forehead, the older man still gazed upward, as if he were interrogating the portrait—as if he were seeking guidance from the imperishable youth of the painted figure. Serene and soft as black pansies, the eyes of the picture looked down on him from a face that reminded him of a white roseleaf.

"It is said"—he hesitated as if the words hurt him—"that your wife accuses you of cruelty. I don't know how the stories started, but I have waited until they reached a point where I felt that they must be stopped—or answered. For the sake of your future—of your work—you must say something, David."

While he listened Blackburn had walked slowly to the window, gazing out on the afterglow, where some soft clouds, like clusters of lilacs, hung low above the dark brown edge of the horizon. For a moment, after the voice ceased, he still stood there in silence. Then wheeling abruptly, he came back to the hearth where the Colonel was waiting.

"Is that all?" he asked.

The Colonel made a gesture of despair. "It is rumoured that your wife is about to leave you."

Blackburn looked at him intently. "If it is only a rumour——"

"But a man's reputation may be destroyed by a rumour."

"Is there anything else?"

As he spoke it was evident to the other that his thoughts were not on his words.

"I am your oldest friend. I was the friend of your mother—I believe in your vision—in your power of leadership. For the sake of the ideas we both try to serve, I have come to you—hating—dreading my task——"

He stopped, his voice quivering as if from an emotion that defied his control, and in the silence that followed, Blackburn said quietly, "I thank you."

"It is said—how this started no one knows, and I suppose it does not matter—that your wife called in the doctor to treat a bruise on her arm, and that she admitted to him that it came from a blow. Daisy Colfax was present, and it appears that she told the story, without malice, but indiscreetly, I gathered——"

As he paused there were beads of perspiration on his forehead, and his lip trembled slightly. It had been a difficult task, but, thank God, he told himself, he had been able to see it through. To his surprise, Blackburn's face had not changed. It still wore the look of immobility which seemed to the other to express nothing—and everything.

"You must let me make some answer to these charges, David. The time has come when you must speak."

For a moment longer Blackburn was silent. Then he said slowly, "What good will it do?"

"But the lie, unless it is given back, will destroy not only you, but your cause. It will be used by your enemies. It will injure irretrievably the work you are trying to do. In the end it will drive you out of public life in Virginia."

"If you only knew how differently I am coming to think of these things," said Blackburn presently, and he added after a pause, "If I cannot bear misunderstanding, how could I bear defeat?—for work like mine must lead to temporary defeat——"

"Not defeat like this—not defeat that leaves your name tarnished."

For the first time Blackburn's face showed emotion. "And you think that a public quarrel would clear it?" he asked bitterly.

"But surely, without that, there could be a denial——"

"There can be no other denial. There is but one way to meet a lie, and that way I cannot take."

"Then things must go on, as they are, to the—end?"

"I cannot stop them by talking. If it rests with me, they must go on."

"At the cost of your career? Of your power for usefulness? Of your obligations to your country?"

Turning his head, Blackburn looked away from him to the window, which had been left open. From the outside there floated suddenly the faint, provocative scent of spring—of nature which was renewing itself in the earth and the trees. "A career isn't as big a thing at forty-three as it is at twenty," he answered, with a touch of irony. "My power for usefulness must stand on its merits alone, and my chief obligation to my country, as I see it, is to preserve the integrity of my honour. We hear a great deal to-day about the personal not counting any longer; yet the fact remains that the one enduring corner-stone of the State is the personal rectitude of its citizens. You cannot build upon any other foundation, and build soundly. I may be wrong—I often am—but I must do what I

believe to be right, let the consequences be what they will."

Now that he had left the emotional issue behind him, the immobility had passed from his manner, and his thoughts were beginning to come with the abundance and richness that the Colonel associated with his public speeches. Already he had put the question of his marriage aside, as a fact which had been accepted and dismissed from his mind.

"In these last few years—or months rather—I have begun to see things differently," he resumed, with an animation and intensity that contrasted strangely with his former constraint and dumbness. "I can't explain how it is, but this war has knocked a big hole in reality. We can look deeper into things than any generation before us, and the deeper we look, the more we become aware of the outer darkness in which we have been groping. I am groping now, I confess it, but I am groping for light."

"It will leave a changed world when it is over," assented the Colonel, and he spoke the platitude with an accent of relief, as if he had just turned away from a sight that distressed him. "More changed, I believe, for us older ones than for the young who have done the actual fighting. I should like to write a book about that—the effect of the war on the minds of the non-combatants. The fighters have been too busy to think, and it is thought, after all, not action, that leaves the more permanent record. Life will spring again over the battle-fields, but the ideas born of the war will control the future destinies of mankind."

"I am beginning to see," pursued Blackburn, as if he had not heard him, "that there is something far bigger

than the beliefs we were working for. Because we had got beyond the sections to the country, you and I, we thought we were emancipated from the bondage of prejudice. The chief end of the citizen appeared to us to be the glory of the nation, but I see now—I am just beginning to see—that there is a greater spirit than the spirit of nationality. You can't live through a world war, even with an ocean between—and distance, by the way, may give us all the better perspective, and enable Americans to take a wider view than is possible to those who are directly in the path of the hurricane—you can't live through a world war, and continue to think in terms of geographical boundaries. To think about it at all, one must think in universal relations."

He hesitated an instant, and then went on more rapidly, "After all, we cannot beat Germany by armies alone, we must beat her by thought. For two generations she has thought wrong, and it is only by thinking right—by forcing her to think right—that we can conquer her. The victory belongs to the nation that engraves its ideas indelibly upon the civilization of the future."

Leaning back in the shadows, Colonel Ashburton gazed at him with a perplexed and questioning look. Was it possible that he had never understood him—that he did not understand him to-day? He had come to speak of an open scandal, of a name that might be irretrievably tarnished—and Blackburn had turned it aside by talking about universal relations!

CHAPTER VI

Angelica's Triumph

Caroline wrote a few nights later:

Dearest mother:

So it has come at last, and we really and truly are at war. There is not so much excitement as you would have thought—I suppose because we have waited so long—but everybody has hung out flags—and Letty and I have just helped Peter put a big beautiful one over Briarlay. Mrs. Blackburn is working so hard over the Red Cross that we have barely seen her for days, and Mary has already gone to New York on her way to France. She is going to work there with one of the war charities, and I think it will be the best thing on earth for her, for any one can see that she has been very unhappy. Mr. Wythe wants to go into the army, but for some reason he has hesitated about volunteering. I think Mrs. Blackburn opposes it very strongly, and this is keeping him back. There is a new feeling in the air, though. The world is rushing on—somewhere—somewhere, and we are rushing with it.

For days I have wanted to write you about a curious thing, but I have waited hoping that I might have been mistaken about it. You remember how very sweet Mrs. Blackburn was to me when I first came here. Well, for the last month she has changed utterly in her manner. I cannot think of any way in which I could have offended her—though I have racked my brain over it—but she appears to avoid me whenever it is possible, and on the occasions when we are obliged to meet, she does not speak to me unless it is necessary. Of course there are things I am obliged to ask her about Letty; but this is usually done through the servants, and Mrs.

Blackburn never comes into the nursery. Sometimes she sends for Letty to come to her, but Mammy Riah always takes her and brings her back again. I asked Mrs. Timberlake if she thought I could have done anything Mrs. Blackburn did not like, and if I had better go to her and demand an explanation. That seems to me the only sensible and straightforward way, but Mrs. Timberlake does not think it would do any good. She is as much mystified about it as I am, and so is Mammy Riah. Nobody understands, and the whole thing has worried me more than I can ever tell you. If it wasn't for Letty, and a promise I made to Mr. Blackburn not to leave her, I should be tempted to give up the place at the end of the week. It is cowardly to let one's self be vanquished by things like that, especially at a time when the whole world needs every particle of courage that human beings can create; but it is just like fighting an intangible enemy, and not knowing at what moment one may be saying or doing the wrong thing. Not a word has been spoken to me that was rude or unkind, yet the very air I breathe is full of something that keeps me apprehensive and anxious all the time. When I am with Mr. Blackburn or Mrs. Timberlake, I tell myself that it is all just my imagination, and that I am getting too nervous to be a good nurse; and then, when I pass Mrs. Blackburn in the hall and she pretends not to see me, the distrust and suspicion come back again. I hate to worry you about this—for a long time I wouldn't mention it in my letters—but I feel to-night that I cannot go on without telling you about it.

Last night after dinner—when Mrs. Blackburn is at home Mrs. Timberlake and I dine in the breakfast-room—I went to look for Letty, and found that she had slipped into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Blackburn and Mr. Wythe were engaged in their perpetual reading. The child is very fond of Mr. Wythe—he has a charming way with her—and when I went in, she was asking him if he were really going to war? Before answering

her he looked for a long time at Mrs. Blackburn, and then as Letty repeated her question, he said, "Don't you think I ought to go, Letty?"

"What is the war about, Alan?" asked the child, and he replied, "They call it a war for democracy." Then, of course, Letty inquired immediately, "What is democracy?" At this Alan burst out laughing, "You-'ve got me there, Socrates," he retorted, "Go inquire of your father." "But father says it is a war to end war," Letty replied, and her next question was, "But if you want to fight, why do you want to end war?" She is the keenest thing for her years you can imagine. I had to explain it all to her when I got her upstairs.

Well, what I started to tell you was that all the time Mrs. Blackburn said nothing, but kept looking from Alan to the child, with that wistful and plaintive expression which makes her the very image of a grieving Madonna. She never spoke a word, but I could tell all the time that she was trying to gain something, that she was using every bit of her charm and her pathos for some purpose I could not discover. In a little while she took Letty from Alan and gave her over to me, and as we went out, I heard Alan say to her, "I would give anything on earth to keep you from being hurt any more." Of course I shouldn't repeat this to any one else, but he must have known that I couldn't help hearing it.

Mr. Blackburn has been very kind to me, and I know that he would do anything for Letty's happiness. He is so impersonal that I sometimes feel that he knows ideas, but not men and women. It is hard for him to break through the wall he has built round himself, but after you once discover what he really is, you are obliged to admit that he is fine and absolutely to be trusted. In a way he is different from any one I have ever known—more sincere and genuine. I can't make what I mean very clear, but you will understand.

For the last week I have scarcely seen him for a minute—I suppose he is absorbed in war matters—but

before that he used to come in and have tea with Letty, and we had some long interesting talks. The child is devoted to him, and you know she loves above all things to set her little table in the nursery, and give tea and bread and butter to whoever happens to come in. Mrs. Colfax used to drop in very often, and so did Mary when she was here; but Mrs. Blackburn always promises to come, and then is too busy, or forgets all about it, and I have to make excuses for her to Letty. I feel sorry for Letty because she is lonely, and has no child companions, and I do everything I can to make her friendly with grown people, and to put a little wholesome pleasure into her life. A delicate child is really a very serious problem in many ways besides physical ones. Letty has not naturally a cheerful disposition, though she flies off at times into a perfect gale of high spirits. For the last week I can see that she has missed her father, and she is continually asking me where he is.

Now I must tell you something I have not mentioned to any one except Mrs. Timberlake, and I spoke of it to her only because she asked me a direct question. Something very unfortunate occurred here last winter, and Mrs. Timberlake told me yesterday that everybody in Richmond has been talking about it. As long as it is known so generally—and it appears that young Mrs. Colfax was the one to let it out—there can't be any harm in my writing frankly to you. I haven't the faintest idea how it all started, but one morning—it must have been two months ago—Mrs. Blackburn showed young Mrs. Colfax a bruise on her arm, and she either told her or let her think that it had come from a blow. Of course Mrs. Colfax inferred that Mr. Blackburn had struck his wife, and, without waiting a minute, she rushed straight out and repeated this to everybody she met. She is so amazingly indiscreet, without meaning the least harm in the world, that you might as well print a thing in the newspaper as tell it to her. No one knows how much she made up and how much Mrs. Blackburn actually told her; but the town has been fairly ringing,

Mrs. Timberlake says, with the scandal. People even say that he has been so cruel to her that the servants heard her cry out in his study one afternoon, and that Alan Wythe, who was waiting in the drawing-room, ran in and interfered.

It is all a dreadful lie, of course—you know this without my telling you—but Mrs. Timberlake and I cannot understand what began it, or why Mrs. Blackburn deliberately allowed Daisy Colfax to repeat such a falsehood. Colonel Ashburton told Mrs. Timberlake that the stories had already done incalculable harm to Mr. Blackburn's reputation, and that his political enemies were beginning to use them. You will understand better than any one else how much this distresses me, not only because I have grown to like and admire Mr. Blackburn, but for Letty's sake also. As the child grows up this disagreement between her parents will make such a difference in her life.

I cannot tell you how I long to be back at The Cedars, now that spring is there and all the lilacs will so soon be in bloom. When I shut my eyes I can see you and the girls in the "chamber," and I can almost hear you talking about the war. I am not quite sure that I approve of Maud's becoming a nurse. It is a hard life, and all her beauty will be wasted in the drudgery. Diana's idea of going to France with the Y. M. C. A. sounds much better, but most of all I like Margaret's plan of canning vegetables next summer for the market. If she can manage to get an extra man to help Jonas with the garden—how would Nathan's son Abraham do?—I believe she will make a great success of it. I am so glad that you are planting large crops this year. The question of labour is serious, I know, but letting out so much of the land "on shares" has never seemed to turn out very well.

It must be almost eleven o'clock, and I have written on and on without thinking. Late as it is, I am obliged to run out to Peter's cottage by the stable and give his wife, Mandy, a hypodermic at eleven o'clock. She was

taken very ill this morning, and if she isn't better to-morrow the doctor will take her to the hospital. I promised him I would see her the last thing to-night, and telephone him if she is any worse. She is so weak that we are giving her all the stimulants that we can. I sometimes wish that I could stop being a trained nurse for a time, and just break loose and be natural. I'd like to run out bareheaded in a storm, or have hysterics, or swear like Uncle George.

Dearest love,
CAROLINE.

When Caroline reached the cottage, she found Mandy in a paroxysm of pain, and after giving the medicine, she waited until the woman had fallen asleep. It was late when she went back to the house, and as she crossed the garden on her way to the terrace, where she had left one of the French windows open, she lingered for a minute to breathe in the delicious roving scents of the spring night. Something sweet and soft and wild in the April air awoke in her the restlessness which the spring always brought; and she found herself wishing again that she could cast aside the professional training of the last eight or nine years, and become the girl she had been at The Cedars before love had broken her heart. "I am just as young as I was then—only I am so much wiser," she thought, "and it is wisdom—it is knowing life that has caged me and made me a prisoner. I am not an actor, I am only a spectator now, and yet I believe that I could break away again if the desire came—if life really called me. Perhaps, it's the spring that makes me restless—I could never, even at The Cedars, smell budding things without wanting to wander—but to-night there is a kind of wildness in everything. I am tired of being caged. I want to be

free to follow—follow—whatever is calling me. I wonder why the pipes of Pan always begin again in the spring?" Enchantingly fair and soft, beneath a silver mist that floated like a breath of dawn from the river, the garden melted into the fields and the fields into the quivering edge of the horizon. In the air there was a faint whispering of gauzy wings, and, now and then, as the breeze stirred the veil of the landscape, little pools of greenish light flickered like glow worms in the hollows.

"I hate to go in, but I suppose I must," thought Caroline, as she went up the steps. "Fortunately Roane is off after his commission, so they can't accuse me of coming out to meet him."

For the first time she noticed that the lights were out in the house, and when she tried the window she had left open, she found that someone—probably Patrick—had fastened it. "I ought to have told them I was going out," she thought. "I suppose the servants are all in bed, and if I go to the front and ring, I shall waken everybody." Then, as she passed along the terrace, she saw that the light still glimmered beneath the curtains of the library, where Blackburn was working late, and stopping before the window, she knocked twice on the panes.

At her second knock, she heard a chair pushed back inside and rapid steps cross the floor. An instant later the window was unbolted, and she saw Blackburn standing there against the lighted interior, with a look of surprise and inquiry, which she discerned even though his face was in shadow. He did not speak, and she said hurriedly as she entered,

"I hated to disturb you, but they had locked me out."

"You have been out?" It was the question he had put to her on her first night in the house.

"Peter's wife has been ill, and I promised the doctor to give her a hypodermic at eleven o'clock. It must be midnight now. They kept me some time at the cottage."

He glanced at the clock. "Yes, it is after twelve. We are working you overtime."

She had crossed the room quickly on her way to the door, when he called her name, and she stopped and turned to look at him.

"Miss Meade, I have wanted to ask you something about Letty when she was not with us."

"I know," she responded, with ready sympathy. "It isn't easy to talk before her without letting her catch on."

"You feel that she is better?"

"Much better. She has improved every day in the last month or two."

"You think now that she may get well in time? There seems to you a chance that she may grow up well and normal?"

"With care I think there is every hope that she will. The doctor is greatly encouraged about her. In this age no physical malady, especially in a child, is regarded as hopeless, and I believe, if we keep up the treatment she is having, she may outgrow the spinal weakness that has always seemed to us so serious."

For a moment he was silent. "Whatever improvement there may be is due to you," he said presently, in a voice that was vibrant with feeling. "I cannot put my gratitude into words, but you have made me your debtor for life."

"I have done my best," she replied gravely, "and it has made me happy to do it."

"I recognize that. The beauty of it has been that I recognized that from the beginning. You have given yourself utterly and ungrudgingly to save my child. Before you came she was misunderstood always, she was melancholy and brooding and self-centred, and you have put the only brightness in her life that has ever been there. All the time she becomes more like other children, more cheerful and natural."

"I felt from the first that she needed companionship and diversion. She won my heart immediately, for she is a very lovable child, and if I have done anything over and above my task, it has been because I loved Letty."

His look softened indescribably, but all he said was, "If I go away, I shall feel that I am leaving her in the best possible care."

"You expect to go away?"

"I have offered my services, and the Government may call on me. I hope there is some work that I can do."

"Everyone feels that way, I think. I feel that way myself, but as long as I can, I shall stay with Letty. It is so hard sometimes to recognize one's real duty. If the call comes, I suppose I shall have to go to France, but I shan't go just because I want to, as long as the child needs me as much as she does now. Mother says the duty that never stays at home is seldom to be trusted."

"I know you will do right," he answered gravely. "I cannot imagine that you could ever waver in that. For myself the obligation seems now imperative, yet I have asked myself again and again if my reasons for wishing to go are as——"

He broke off in amazement, and glanced, with a startled gesture, at the door, for it was opening very slowly, and, as the crack widened, there appeared the lovely disarranged head of Angelica. She was wearing a kimono of sky-blue silk, which she had thrown on hastily over her nightgown, and beneath the embroidered folds, Caroline caught a glimpse of bare feet in blue slippers. In the hall beyond there was the staring face of the maid, and at the foot of the stairs, the figure of Mammy Riah emerged, like a menacing spirit, out of the shadow.

"I heard Mammy Riah asking for Miss Meade. She was not in her room," began Angelica in her clear, colourless voice. "We were anxious about her—but I did not know—I did not dream——" She drew her breath sharply, and then added in a louder and firmer tone, "Miss Meade, I must ask you to leave the house in the morning."

In an instant a cold breath blowing over Caroline seemed to turn her living figure into a snow image. Her face was as white as the band of her cap, but her eyes blazed like blue flames, and her voice, when it issued from her frozen lips, was stronger and steadier than Angelica's.

"I cannot leave too soon for my comfort," she answered haughtily. "Mr. Blackburn, if you will order the car, I shall be ready in an hour——" Though she saw scarlet as she spoke, she would have swept by Angelica with the pride and the outraged dignity of an insulted empress.

"You shall not go," said Blackburn, and she saw him put out his arm, as if he would keep the two women apart.

"I would not stay," replied Caroline, looking not at him, but straight into Angelica's eyes. "I would not stay if she went on her knees to me. I will not stay even for Letty——"

"Do you know what you have done?" demanded Blackburn, in a quivering voice, of his wife. "Do you know that you are ruining your child's future—your child's chance——" Then, as if words were futile to convey his meaning, he stopped, and looked at her as a man looks at the thing that has destroyed him.

"For Letty's sake I shut my eyes as long as I could," said Angelica, and of the three, she appeared the only one who spoke in sorrow and regret, not in anger. "After to-night I can deceive myself no longer. I can deceive the servants no longer——"

Her kimono was embroidered in a lavish design of cranes and water-lilies; and while Caroline gazed at it, she felt that the vivid splashes of yellow and blue and purple were emblazoned indelibly on her memory. Years afterwards—to the very end of her life—the sight of a piece of Japanese embroidery was followed by an icy sickness of the heart, and a vision of Angelica's amber head against the background of the dimly lighted hall and the curious faces of the maid and Mammy Riah.

"You shall not——" said Blackburn, and his face was like the face of a man who has died in a moment of horror. "You shall not dare do this thing——"

He was still keeping Caroline back with his outstretched hand, and while she looked at him, she forgot her own anger in a rush of pity for the humiliation which showed in every quiver of his features, in every line of

his figure. It was a torture, she knew, which would leave its mark on him for ever.

"You shall not dare——" he repeated, as if the words he sought would not come to him.

Beneath his gaze Angelica paled slowly. Her greatest victories had always been achieved through her dumbness; and the instinct which had guided her infallibly in the past did not fail her in this moment, which must have appeared to her as the decisive hour of her destiny. There was but one way in which she could triumph, and this way she chose, not deliberately, but in obedience to some deep design which had its source in the secret motive-power of her nature. The colour of her skin faded to ivory, her long, slender limbs trembled and wavered, and the pathos of her look was intensified into the image of tragedy.

"I tried so hard not to see——" she began, and the next instant she gave a little gasping sob and dropped, like a broken flower, at his feet.

For a second Caroline looked down on her in silence. Then, without stooping, without speaking, she drew her skirt aside, and went out of the room and up the stairs. Her scorn was the scorn of the strong who is defeated for the weak who is victorious.

CHAPTER VII

Courage

When she reached her room, Caroline took off her cap and uniform and laid them smoothly away in her trunk. Then she began packing with deliberate care, while her thoughts whirled as wildly as autumn leaves in a storm. Outwardly her training still controlled her; but beneath her quiet gestures, her calm and orderly movements, she felt that the veneer of civilization had been stripped from the primitive woman. It was as if she had lived years in the few minutes since she had left Angelica lying, lovely and unconscious, on the floor of the library.

She was taking her clothes out of the closet when there was a low knock at her door, and Mammy Riah peered inquiringly into the room.

"Marse David tole me ter come," she said. "Is you gwine away, honey?"

Before she replied, Caroline crossed the floor and closed the door of the nursery. "I am going home on the earliest train in the morning. Will you be sure to order the car?"

The old woman came in and took the clothes out of Caroline's hands. "You set right down, en wait twell I git thoo wid dis yer packin'. Marse David, he tole me ter look atter you de same ez I look atter Letty, en I'se gwine ter do whut he tells me."

She looked a thousand years old as she stood there

beside the shaded electric light on the bureau; but her dark and wrinkled face contained infinite understanding and compassion. At the moment, in the midst of Caroline's terrible loneliness, Mammy Riah appeared almost beautiful.

"I have to move about, mammy, I can't sit still. You were there. You saw it all."

"I seed hit comin' befo' den, honey, I seed hit comin'."

"But you knew I'd gone out to see Mandy? You knew she was suffering?"

"Yas'm, I knows all dat, but I knows a heap mo'n dat, too."

"You saw Mrs. Blackburn? You heard?——"

"I 'uz right dar all de time. I 'uz right dar at de foot er de steers."

"Do you know why? Can you imagine why she should have done it?"

Mammy Riah wrinkled her brow, which was the colour and texture of stained parchment. "I'se moughty ole, and I'se moughty sharp, chile, but I cyarn' see thoo a fog. I ain' sayin' nuttin' agin Miss Angy, caze she wuz oner de Fitzhugh chillun, ef'n a wi'te nuss did riz 'er. Naw'm, I ain' sayin' nuttin 't'all agin 'er—but my eyes dey is done got so po' dat I cyarn' mek out whar she's a-gwine en whut she's a-fishin' fur."

"I suppose she was trying to make me leave. But why couldn't she have come out and said so?"

"Go 'way f'om yer, chile! Ain't you knowed Miss Angy better'n dat? She is jes' erbleeged ter be meally-mouthed en two-faced, caze she wuz brung up dat ar way. All de chillun dat w'ite nuss riz wuz sorter puny en pigeon-breasted inside en out, en Miss Angy

she wuz jes' like de res' un um. She ain' never come right spang out en axed fur whut she gits, en she ain' never gwine ter do hit. Naw'm, dat she ain't. She is a-gwine ter look put upon, en meek ez Moses, en jes like butter wouldn't melt in 'er mouf, ef'n hit kills 'er. I'se done knowed 'er all 'er lifetime, en I ain' never seed 'er breck loose, nairy oncet. Ole Miss use'n ter say w'en she wuz live, dat Miss Angy's temper wuz so slow en poky, she'd git ter woner sometimes ef'n she reely hed a speck er one."

"That must be why everybody thinks her a martyr," said Caroline sternly. "Even to-night she didn't lose her temper. You saw her faint away at my feet?"

A shiver shook her figure, as the vision of the scene rushed before her; and bending down, with a dress still in her arms, the old woman patted and soothed her as if she had been a child.

"Dar now, dar now," she murmured softly. Then, raising her head, with sudden suspicion, she said in a sharp whisper, "Dat warn' no sho' nuff faintin'. She wuz jes' ez peart ez she could be w'en she flopped down dar on de flo'."

"I didn't touch her. I wouldn't have touched her if she had been dying!" declared Caroline passionately.

Mammy Riah chuckled. "You is git ter be a reel spit-fire, honey."

"I'm not a spit-fire, but I'm so angry that I see red."

"Cose you is, cose you is, but dat ain' no way ter git erlong in dis worl', perticular wid men folks. You ain' never seed Miss Angy git ez mad ez fire wid nobody, is you? Dar now! I low you ain' never seed hit. You ain' never seed 'er git all in a swivet 'bout nuttin? Ain't she al'ays jes' ez sof' ez silk, no matter whut happen?

Dat's de bes' way ter git erlong, honey, you lissen ter me. De mo' open en above boa'd you is, de mo' you is gwine ter see de thing you is atter begin ter shy away f'om you. Dar's Miss Matty Timberlake now! Ain't she de sort dat ain' got no sof' soap about 'er, en don't she look jes egzactly ez ef'n de buzzards hed picked 'er? Naw'm, you teck en watch Miss Angy, en she's gwine ter sho' you sump'n. She ain' never let on ter nobody, she ain't. Dar ain' nobody gwine ter know whut she's a-fishin' fur twell she's done cotched hit." There was an exasperated pride in her manner, as if she respected, even while she condemned, the success of Angelica's method.

"Yas, Lawd! I'se knowed all de Fitzhughs f'om way back, en I ain' knowed nairy one un um dat could beat Miss Angy w'en hit comes ter gettin' whut she wants—in perticular ef'n hit belongst ter somebody else. I'se seed 'er wid 'er pa, en I'se seed 'er wid Marse David, en dey warn' no mo' den chillun by de time she got thoo wid um. Is you ever seed a man, no matter how big he think hisself, dat warn' ready ter flop right down ez weak ez water, ez soon as she set 'er een on 'im? I'se watched 'er wid Marse David way back yonder, befo' he begunst his cotin', en w'en I see 'er sidle up ter 'im, lookin ez sweet ez honey, en pertendin' dat she ain' made up er min' yit wedder she is mos' pleased wid 'im er feared un 'im, den I knows hit wuz all up wid 'im, ef'n he warn't ez sharp ez a needle. Do you reckon she 'ould ever hev cotched Marse David ef'n he'd a knowed whut 't'wuz she wuz atter? Naw'm, dat she 'ouldn't, caze men folks dey ain' made dat ar way. Deys erbleeged ter be doin' whut dey think you don't want 'um ter do, jes' like chillun, er dey cyarn' git enny

spice outer doin' hit. Dat's de reason de 'ooman dey mos' often breecks dere necks tryin' ter git is de v'ey las' one dat deys gwinter want ter keep atter deys got 'er. A she fox is a long sight better in de bushes den she is in de kennel; but men folks dey ain' never gwine ter fin' dat out twell she's done bitten um."

While she rambled on, she had been busily folding the clothes and packing them into the trunk, and pausing now in her work, she peered into Caroline's face. "You look jes' egzactly ez ef'n you'd seed a ha'nt, honey," she said. "Git in de baid, en try ter go right straight ter sleep, w'ile I git thoo dis yer packin' in a jiffy."

Aching in every nerve, Caroline undressed and threw herself into bed. The hardest day of nursing had never left her like this—had never exhausted her so utterly in body and mind. She felt as if she had been beaten with rocks; and beneath the sore, bruised feeling of her limbs there was the old half-forgotten quiver of humiliation, which brought back to her the vision of that autumn morning at The Cedars—of the deep blue of the sky, the shivering leaves of the aspens, and the long straight road drifting through light and shadow into other roads that led on somewhere—somewhere. Could she never forget? Was she for ever chained to an inescapable memory?

"Is you 'bleeged ter go?" inquired the old woman, stopping again in her packing.

"Yes, I'm obliged to go. I wouldn't stay now if they went down on their knees to me."

"You ain't mad wid Marse David, is you?"

"No, I'm not angry with Mr. Blackburn. He has been very kind to me, and I am sorry to leave Letty." For the first time the thought of the child occurred to

her. Incredible as it seemed she had actually forgotten her charge.

"She sutney is gwine ter miss you."

"I think she will, poor little Letty. I wonder what they will make of her?"

Closing her eyes wearily, she turned her face to the wall, and lay thinking of the future. "I will not be beaten," she resolved passionately. "I will not let them hurt me." Some old words she had said long ago at The Cedars came back to her, and she repeated them over and over, "People cannot hurt you unless you let them. They cannot hurt you unless you submit—unless you deliver your soul into their hands—and I will never submit. Life is mine as much as theirs. The battle is mine, and I will fight it." She remembered her first night at Briarlay, when she had watched the light from the house streaming out into the darkness, and had felt that strange forewarning of the nerves, that exhilarating sense of approaching destiny, that spring-like revival of her thoughts and emotions. How wonderful Mrs. Blackburn had appeared then! How ardently she might have loved her! For an instant the veiled figure of her imagination floated before her, and she was tormented by the pang that follows not death, but disillusionment. "I never harmed her. I would have died for her in the beginning. Why should she have done it?"

Opening her eyes she stared up at the wall beside her bed, where Mammy Riah's shadow hovered like some grotesque bird of prey.

"Did you order the car, Mammy Riah?"

"Yas'm, I tole John jes' like you axed me. Now, I'se done got de las' one er dese things packed, en I'se gwine

ter let you git some sleep." She put out the light while she spoke, and then went out softly, leaving the room in darkness.

"*Why should she have done it? Why should she have done it?*" asked Caroline over and over, until the words became a refrain that beat slowly, with a rhythmic rise and fall, in her thoughts: "*Why should she have done it?* I thought her so good and beautiful. I would have worked my fingers to the bone for her if she had only been kind to me. *Why should she have done it?* I should always have taken her part against Mr. Blackburn, against Mrs. Timberlake, against Mammy Riah. It would have been so easy for her to have kept my love and admiration. It would have cost her nothing. *Why should she have done it?* There is nothing she can gain by this, and it isn't like her to do a cruel thing unless there is something she can gain. She likes people to admire her and believe in her. That is why she has taken so much trouble to appear right before the world, and to make Mr. Blackburn appear wrong. Admiration is the breath of life to her, and—and—oh, why *should she have done it?* I must go to sleep. I must put it out of my mind. If I don't put it out of my mind, I shall go mad before morning. I ought to be glad to leave Briarlay. I ought to want to go, but I do not. I do not want to go. I feel as if I were tearing my heart to pieces. I cannot bear the thought of never seeing the place again—of never seeing Letty again. *Why should she have done it?*——"

In the morning, when she was putting on her hat, Mrs. Timberlake came in with a breakfast tray in her hands.

"Sit down, and try to eat something, Caroline. I

thought you would rather have a cup of coffee up here."

Caroline shook her head. "I couldn't touch a morsel in this house. I feel as if it would choke me."

"But you will be sick before you get home. Just drink a swallow or two."

Taking the cup from her, Caroline began drinking it so hurriedly that the hot coffee burned her lips. "Yes, you are right," she said presently. "I cannot fight unless I keep up my strength, and I will fight to the bitter end. I will not let her hurt me. I am poor and unknown, and I work for my living, but the world is mine as much as hers, and I will not give in. I will not let life conquer me."

"You aren't blaming David, are you, dear?"

"Oh, no, I am not blaming Mr. Blackburn. He couldn't have helped it." Her heart gave a single throb while she spoke; and it seemed to her that, in the midst of the anguish and humiliation, something within her soul, which had been frozen for years, thawed suddenly and grew warm again. It was just as if a statue had come to life, as if what had been marble yesterday had been blown upon by a breath of the divine, and changed into flesh. For eight years she had been dead, and now, in an instant, she was born anew, and had entered afresh into her lost heritage of joy and pain.

Mrs. Timberlake, gazing at her through dulled eyes, was struck by the intensity of feeling that glowed in her pale face and in the burning blue of her eyes. "I didn't know she could look like that," thought the housekeeper. "I didn't know she had so much heart." Aloud she said quietly, "David and I are going to the train with you. That is why I put on my bonnet."

"Is Mr. Blackburn obliged to go with us?" Caroline's voice was almost toneless, but there was a look of wonder and awe in her face, as of one who is standing on the edge of some undiscovered country, of some virgin wilderness. The light that fell on her was the light of that celestial hemisphere where Mrs. Timberlake had never walked.

"He wishes to go," answered the older woman, and she added with an after-thought, "It will look better."

"As if it mattered how things look? I'd rather not see him again, but, after all, it makes no difference."

"It wasn't his fault, Caroline."

"No, it wasn't his fault. He has always been good to me."

"If anything, it has been harder on him than on you. It is only a few hours of your life, but it is the whole of his. She has spoiled his life from the first, and now she has ruined his career forever. Even before this, Colonel Ashburton told me that all that talk last winter had destroyed David's future. He said he might have achieved almost anything if he had had half a chance, but that he regarded him now merely as a brilliant failure. Angelica went to work deliberately to ruin him."

"But why?" demanded Caroline passionately. "What was there she could gain by it?"

Mrs. Timberlake blinked at the sunlight. "For the first time in my life," she confessed, "I don't know what she is up to. I can't, to save my life, see what she has got in her mind."

"She can't be doing it just to pose as an ill-treated wife? The world is on her side already. There isn't

a person outside of this house who doesn't look upon her as a saint and martyr."

"I know there isn't. That is what puzzles me. I declare, if it didn't sound so far-fetched, I'd be almost tempted to believe that she was trying to get that young fool for good."

"Mr. Wythe? But what would she do with him? She is married already, and you know perfectly well that she wouldn't do anything that the world calls really wrong."

"She'd be burned at the stake first. Well, I give it up. I've raked my brain trying to find some reason at the bottom of it, but it isn't any use, and I've had to give it up in the end. Then, last night after David told me about that scene downstairs—he waked me up to tell me—it suddenly crossed my mind just like that—" she snapped her fingers—"that perhaps she's sharper than we've ever given her credit for being. I don't say it's the truth, because I don't know any more than a babe unborn whether it is or not; but the idea did cross my mind that maybe she felt if she could prove David really cruel and faithless to her—if she could make up a case so strong that people's sympathy would support her no matter what she did—then she might manage to get what she wanted without having to give up anything in return. You know Angelica could never bear to give up anything. She has got closets and closets filled with old clothes, which she'd never think of wearing, but just couldn't bear to give away——"

"You mean——?" The blackness of the abyss struck Caroline speechless.

"I don't wonder that you can't take it in. I couldn't at first. It seems so unlike anything that could ever happen in Virginia."

"It would be so—"Caroline hesitated for a word—"so incredibly common."

"Of course you feel that way about it, and so would Angelica's mother. I reckon she would turn in her grave at the bare thought of her daughter's even thinking of a divorce."

"You mean she would sacrifice me like this? She would not only ruin her husband, she would try to destroy me, though I've never harmed her?"

"That hasn't got anything in the world to do with it. She isn't thinking of you, and she isn't thinking of Alan. She is thinking about what she wants. It is surprising how badly you can want a thing even when you have neither feeling nor imagination. Angelica isn't any more in love with that young ass than I am; but she wants him just as much as if she were over head and ears in love. There is one thing, however, you may count on—she is going to get him if she can, and she is going to persuade herself and everybody else, except you and David and me, that she is doing her duty when she goes after her inclinations. I don't reckon there was ever anybody stronger on the idea of duty than Angelica," she concluded in a tone of acrid admiration.

"Of course, she will always stand right before the world," assented Caroline, "I know that."

"Well, it takes some sense to manage it, you must admit?"

"I wish I'd never come here. I wish I'd never seen Briarlay," cried Caroline, in an outburst of anger. "There is the car at the door. We'd better go."

"Won't you tell Letty good-bye?"

For the first time tears rushed to Caroline's eyes. "No, I'd rather not. Give her my love after I'm gone."

In the hall Blackburn was waiting for them, and Caroline's first thought, as she glanced at him, was that he had aged ten years since the evening before. A rush of pity for him, not for herself, choked her to silence while she put her hand into his, which felt as cold as ice when she touched it. In that moment she forgot the wrong that she had suffered, she forgot her wounded pride, her anguish and humiliation, and remembered only that he had been hurt far more deeply.

"I hope you slept," he said awkwardly, and she answered, "Very little. Is the car waiting?"

Then, as he turned to go down the steps, she brushed quickly past him, and entered the car after Mrs. Timberlake. She felt that her heart was breaking, and she could think of no words to utter. There were trivial things, she knew, that might be said, casual sounds that might relieve the strain of the silence; but she could not remember what they were, and where her thoughts had whirled so wildly all night long, there was now only a terrible vacancy, round which sinister fears moved, but into which nothing entered. A strange oppressive dumbness, a paralysis of the will, seized her. If her life had depended on it, she felt that she should have been powerless to put two words together with an intelligible meaning.

Blackburn got into the car, and a moment later they started round the circular drive, and turned into the lane.

"Did John put in the bag?" inquired Mrs. Timber lake nervously.

"Yes, it is in front." As he replied, Blackburn turned slightly, and the sunshine falling aslant the boughs of the maples, illumined his face for an instant

before the car sped on into the shadows. In that minute it seemed to Caroline that she could never forget the misery in his eyes, or the look of grimness and determination the night had graven about his mouth. Every line in his forehead, every thread of grey in his dark hair, would remain in her memory for ever. "He looked so much younger when I came here," she thought. "These last months have cost him his youth and his happiness."

"I am so glad you have a good day for your trip," said Mrs. Timberlake, and almost to her surprise Caroline heard her own voice replying distinctly, "Yes, it is a beautiful day."

"Will you telegraph your mother from the station?"

"She wouldn't get it. There is no telephone, and we send only once a day for the mail."

"Then she won't be expecting you?"

"No, she won't be expecting me."

At this Blackburn turned. "What can we do, Miss Meade, to help you?"

Again she seemed to herself to answer with her lips before she had selected the words, "Nothing, thank you. There is absolutely nothing that you can do." The soft wind had loosened a lock of hair under her veil, and putting up her hand, she pushed it back into place.

Rain had fallen in the night, and the morning was fresh and fine, with a sky of cloudless turquoise blue. The young green leaves by the roadside shone with a sparkling lustre, while every object in the landscape appeared to quiver and glisten in the spring sunlight.

"I shall never see it again—I shall never see it again." Suddenly, without warning, Caroline's thoughts came flocking back as riotously as they had done through the

long, sleepless night. The external world at which she looked became a part of the intense inner world of her mind; and the mental vacancy was crowded in an instant with a vivid multitude of figures. Every thought, every sensation, every image of the imagination and of memory, seemed to glitter with a wonderful light and freshness, as the objects in the landscape glittered when the April sunshine streamed over them.

"Yes, I am leaving it forever. I shall never see it again, but why should I care so much? Why does it make me so unhappy, as if it were tearing the heart out of my breast? Life is always that—leaving things forever, and giving up what you would rather keep. I have left places I cared for before, and yet I have never felt like this, not even when I came away for the first time from The Cedars. Every minute I am going farther and farther away. We are in the city now; flags are shining, too, in the sun. I have never seen so many flags—as if flags alone meant war! War! Why, I had almost forgotten the war! And yet it is the most tremendous thing that has ever been on the earth, and nothing else really matters—neither Briarlay, nor Mrs. Blackburn, nor my life, nor Mr. Blackburn's, nor anything that happened last night. It was all so little—as little as the thing Mrs. Blackburn is trying to get, the thing she calls happiness. It is as little as the thing I have lost—as little as my aching heart——"

"Do you know," said Mrs. Timberlake, "I had not realized that we were at war—but look at the flags!" Her lustreless eyes were lifted, with a kind of ecstasy, in the sunlight, and then as no one answered, she added softly, "It makes one stop and think."

"I must try to remember the war," Caroline was tell-

ing herself. "If I remember the war, perhaps I shall forget the ache in my heart. The larger pain will obliterate the smaller. If I can only forget myself——" But, in spite of the effort of will, she could not feel the war as keenly as she felt the parting from something which seemed more vital to her than her life. "We are at war," she thought, and immediately, "I shall never see it again—I shall never see it again."

The car stopped at the station, and a minute afterwards she followed Mrs. Timberlake across the pavement and through the door, which Blackburn held open. As she entered, he said quickly, "I will get your ticket and meet you at the gate."

"Has John got the bag?" asked Mrs. Timberlake, glancing back.

"Yes, he is coming." Caroline was looking after Blackburn, and while she did so, she was conscious of a wish that she had spoken to him in the car while she still had the opportunity. "I might at least have been kinder," she thought regretfully, "I might have shown him that I realized it was not his fault—that he was not to blame for anything from the beginning——" A tall countryman, carrying a basket of vegetables, knocked against her, and when she turned to look back again, Blackburn had disappeared. "It is too late now. I shall never see him again."

The station was crowded; there was a confused rumble of sounds, punctuated by the shrill cries of a baby, in a blue crocheted hood, that was struggling to escape from the arms of a nervous-looking mother. In front of Mrs. Timberlake, who peered straight ahead at the gate, there was a heavy man, with a grey beard, and beside him a small anxious-eyed woman, who listened,

with distracted attention, to the emphatic sentences he was uttering. "Why doesn't he stop talking and let us go on," thought Caroline. "What difference does it make if the whole world is going to ruin?" Even now, if she could only go faster, there might be time for a few words with Blackburn before the train started. If only she might tell him that she was not ungrateful—that she understood, and would be his friend always. A hundred things that she wanted to say flashed through her mind, and these things appeared so urgent that she wondered how she could have forgotten them on the long drive from Briarlay. "I must tell him. It is the only chance I shall ever have," she kept saying over and over; but when at last she heard his voice, and saw him awaiting them in the crowd, she could recall none of the words that had rushed to her lips the moment before. "It is the only chance I shall ever have," she repeated, though the phrase meant nothing to her any longer.

"I tell you it's the farmers that pay for everything, and they are going to pay for the war," declared the grey-bearded man, in a harsh, polemical voice, and the anxious-eyed woman threw a frightened glance over her shoulder, as if the remark had been treasonable. Mrs. Timberlake had already passed through the gate, and was walking, with a hurried, nervous air, down the long platform. As she followed at Blackburn's side, it seemed to Caroline that she should feel like this if she were going to execution instead of back to The Cedars. She longed with all her heart to utter the regret that pervaded her thoughts, to speak some profound and memorable words that would separate this moment from every other moment that would come in the future —yet she went on in silence toward the waiting train,

where the passengers were already crowding into the cars.

At the step Mrs. Timberlake kissed her, and then drew back, wiping her reddened lids.

"Good-bye, my dear, I shall write to you."

"Good-bye. I can never forget how kind you have been to me."

Raising her eyes, she saw Blackburn looking down on her, and with an effort to be casual and cheerful, she held out her hand, while a voice from somewhere within her brain kept repeating, "You must say something now that he will remember. It is the last chance you will ever have in your life."

"Good-bye." Her eyes were smiling.

"Your chair is sixteen. Good-bye."

It was over; she was on the platform, and the passengers were pushing her into the car. She had lost her last chance, and she had lost it smiling. "It doesn't matter," she whispered. "I am glad to be going home —and life cannot hurt you unless you let it."

The smile was still on her lips, but the eyes with which she sought out her chair were wet with tears.

CHAPTER VIII

The Cedars

No one met her at the little country station, and leaving her bag for old Jonas, she started out alone to walk the two miles to The Cedars. Straight ahead the long, empty road trailed beneath the fresh young foliage of the woods, the little curled red velvet leaves of the oaks shining through the sea-green mist of the hickories and beeches; and she felt that within her soul there was only a continuation of this long, straight emptiness that led on to nothing. Overhead flocks of small fleecy clouds, as white as swans-down, drifted across the changeable April sky, while the breeze, passing through the thick woods, stirred the delicate flower-like shadows on the moist ground. "Spring is so sad," she thought. "I never understood before how much sadder spring is than autumn." This sadness of budding things, of renewing life, of fugitive scents and ephemeral colours, had become poignantly real. "It makes me want something different—something I have never had; and that is the sharpest desire on earth—the desire for a happiness that hasn't a name." A minute afterwards she concluded resolutely, "That is weakness, and I will not be weak. One must either conquer or be conquered by life—and I will not be conquered. Anybody can be miserable, but it takes courage to be happy. It takes courage and determination and intelligence to get the best out of whatever happens, and

the only way to begin is to begin by getting the best out of yourself. Now I might have been hurt, but I am not because I won't let myself be. I might be unhappy, but I am not because my life is my own, and I can make of it anything that I choose." Then suddenly she heard an inner voice saying from a great distance, "It is my last chance. I shall never see him again." With the words her memory was illuminated by a flame; and in the burning light she saw clearly the meaning of everything that had happened—of her sorrow, her dumbness, her longing to speak some splendid and memorable word at the last. It was not to Briarlay, it was not even to Letty, that her thoughts had clung at the moment of parting. She had wanted David Blackburn to remember because it was the separation from him, she knew now, that would make her unhappy. Unconsciously, before she had suspected the truth, he had become an inseparable part of her world; unconsciously she had let the very roots of her life entwine themselves about the thought of him.

Standing there in the deserted road, beneath the changeable blue of the sky, she turned to fight this secret and pitiless enemy. "I will not let it conquer me. I will conquer, as I have conquered worse things than this. I believed myself dead because I had once been disappointed. I believed myself secure because I had once been stabbed to the heart. This is the punishment for my pride—this humiliation and bitterness and longing from which I shall never be free." An unyielding cord stretched from her heart back to Briarlay, drawing stronger and tighter with every step of the distance. It would always be there. The pain would not lessen with time. The flame of memory would

grow brighter, not paler, with the days, months, and years.

The April wind, soft, provocative, sweet-scented, blew in her face as she looked back; and down the long road, between the rose and green of the woods, an unbroken chain of memories stretched toward her. She saw Blackburn as he had appeared on that first night at Briarlay, standing in the door of his library when she came in from the terrace; she saw him in Letty's room at midnight, sitting beside the night lamp on the candle-stand, with the book, which he did not read, open before him; she saw him in the day nursery, his face enkindled with tenderness; she saw him in the midst of the snowy landscape, when there had been rage in his look at the half-drunken Roane; and she saw him, most clearly of all, as he looked facing, on that last night, the hour that would leave its mark on him for ever. It was as if this chain of memories, beginning in the vague sunshine and shadow of the distance, grew more distinct, more vivid, as it approached, until at last the images of her mind gathered, like actual presences, in the road before her. She could not escape them, she knew. They were as inevitable as regret, and would follow her through the bitter years ahead, as they had followed her through the hours since she had left him. She must stand her ground, and fight for peace as valiantly as she had ever fought in the past.

"I cannot escape it," she said, as she turned to go on, "I must accept it and use it because that is the only way. Mine is only one among millions of aching hearts, and all this pain must leave the world either better or worse than it was—all this pain will be used on the side either of light or of darkness. Even sorrow may stand

in the end for the world's happiness, just as the tragedy of this war may make a greater peace in the future. If I can only keep this thought, I shall conquer—war may bring peace, and pain may bring joy—in the end."

Beyond the white gate, the old aspens glimmered silver green in the sunlight, and, half-hidden in a dusky cloud of cedars, she saw the red chimneys and the dormer-windows of the house. Home at last! And home was good however she came to it. With a smile she drew out the bar, and after replacing it, went on with an energetic and resolute step.

The door was open, and looking through the hall, she saw her mother crossing the back porch, with a yellow bowl of freshly churned butter in her hands.

Mrs Meade had grown older in the last six months, and she limped slightly from rheumatism; but her expression of sprightly cheerfulness had not changed, and her full pink face was still pretty. There was something strangely touching in the sight of her active figure, which was beginning at last to stoop, and in her brisk, springy step, which appeared to ignore, without disguising, the limp in her walk. Never, it seemed to Caroline, had she seen her so closely—with so penetrating a flash of understanding and insight. Bare and hard as life had been, she had cast light, not shadow, around her; she had stood always on the side of the world's happiness.

"Mother, dear, I've come home to see you!" cried Caroline gaily.

The old lady turned with a cry. "Why, Caroline, what on earth?" she exclaimed, and carefully set down the bowl she was carrying.

The next instant Caroline was in her arms, laughing and crying together.

"Oh, mother, I wanted to see you, so I came home!"

"Is anything wrong, dear?"

"Nothing that cannot be made right. Nothing in the world that cannot be made right."

Drawing her out on the porch, Mrs. Meade gazed earnestly into her face. "You are a little pale. Have you been ill, Caroline?"

"I never had much colour, you know, but I am perfectly well."

"And happy, darling?" The dear features, on which time was beginning to trace tender lines of anxiety, beamed on her daughter, with the invincible optimism that life had granted in place of bodily ease. As the wind stirred the silvery hair, Caroline noticed that it had grown a little thinner, though it was still as fine and light as spun flax. For the first time she realized that her mother possessed the beauty which is permanent and indestructible—the beauty of a fervent and dominant soul. Age could soften, but it could not destroy, the charm that was independent of physical change.

Caroline smiled brightly. "Happy to be with you, precious mother."

"Maud is in the hospital, you know, and Diana is in New York getting ready to sail. Only Margaret is left with me, and she hasn't been a bit well this winter. She is working hard over her garden."

"Yes, you wrote me. While I am here, I will help her. I want to work very hard."

"Can you stay long now? It will be such a comfort to have you. Home never seems just right when one of you is away, and now there will be three. You knew old Docia was sick, didn't you? We have had to put her daughter Perzelia in the kitchen, and she is only a field

hand. The cooking isn't very good, but you won't mind. I always make the coffee and the batter bread."

"You know I shan't mind, but I must go back to work in a week or two. Somebody must keep the dear old roof mended."

Mrs. Meade laughed, and the sound was like music. "It has been leaking all winter." Then she added, while the laugh died on her lips, "Have you left Briarlay for good?"

"Yes, for good. I shall never go back."

"But you seemed so happy there?"

"I shall be still happier somewhere else—for I am going to be happy, mother, wherever I am." Though she smiled as she answered, her eyes left her mother's face, and sought the road, where the long procession of the aspens shivered like gray-green ghosts in the wind.

"I am so glad, dear, but there hasn't been anything to hurt you, has there? I hope Mr. Blackburn hasn't been disagreeable."

"Oh, no, he has been very kind. I cannot begin to tell you how kind he has been." Her voice trembled for an instant, and then went on brightly, "And so has Mrs. Timberlake. At first I didn't like her. I thought she was what Docia calls 'ficy,' but afterwards, as I wrote you so often, she turned out to be very nice and human. First impressions aren't always reliable. If they were life would be easier, and there wouldn't be so many disappointments—but do you know the most valuable lesson I've learned this winter? Well, it is not to trust my first impression—of a cat. The next time old Jonas brings me a lot of kittens and asks me what I think of them, I'm going to answer, 'I can't tell, Jonas, until I discover their hidden qualities.' It's the

hidden qualities that make or mar life, and yet we accept or reject people because of something on the surface—something that doesn't really matter at all."

She was gay enough; her voice was steady; her laugh sounded natural; the upward sweep of the black brows was as charming as ever; and the old sunny glance was searching the distance. There was nothing that Mrs. Meade could point to and say "this is different"; yet the change was there, and the mother felt, with the infallible instinct of love, that the daughter who had come home to her was not the Caroline who had left The Cedars six months ago. "She is keeping something from me," thought Mrs. Meade. "For the first time in her life she is keeping something from me."

"Now I must take off my hat and go to work," said Caroline, eagerly, and she added under her breath, "It will rest me to work."

The fragrance of spring was in the air, and through the fortnight that she stayed at The Cedars, it seemed to her that this inescapable sweetness became a reminder and a torture—a reminder of the beauty and the evanescence of youth, a torture to all the sensitive nerves of her imagination, which conjured up delusive visions of happiness. In the beginning she had thought that work would be her salvation, as it had been when she was younger, that every day, every week, would soften the pain, until at last it would melt into the shadows of memory, and cease to trouble her life. But as the days went by, she realized that this emotion differed from that earlier one as maturity differs from adolescence—not in weakness, but in the sharper pang of its regret. Hour by hour, the image of Blackburn grew clearer, not dimmer, in her mind;

day by day, the moments that she had spent with him appeared to draw closer instead of retreating farther away. Because he had never been to The Cedars she had believed that she could escape the sharper recollections while she was here; yet she found now that every object at which she looked—the house, the road, the fields, the garden, even the lilacs blooming beneath her window—she found now that all these dear familiar things were attended by a thronging multitude of associations. The place that he had never known was saturated with his presence. "If I could only forget him," she thought. "Caring wouldn't matter so much, if I could only stop thinking." But, through some perversity of will, the very effort that she made to forget him served merely to strengthen the power of remembrance—as if the energy of mind were condensed into some clear and sparkling medium which preserved and intensified the thought of him. After hours of work, in which she had buried the memories of Briarlay, they would awake more ardently as soon as she raised her head and released her hands from her task. The resolution which had carried her through her first tragedy failed her utterly now, for this was a situation, she found, where resolution appeared not to count.

And the bitterest part was that when she looked back now on those last months at Briarlay, she saw them, not as they were in reality, filled with minor cares and innumerable prosaic anxieties, but irradiated by the rosy light her imagination had enkindled about them. She had not known then that she was happy; but it seemed to her now that, if she could only recover the past, if she could only walk up the drive again and enter the house and see Blackburn and Letty, it would mean perfect

and unalterable happiness. At night she would dream sometimes of the outside of the house and the drive and the elms, which she saw always shedding their bronze leaves in the autumn; but she never got nearer than the white columns, and the front door remained closed when she rang the bell, and even beat vainly on the knocker. These dreams invariably left her exhausted and in a panic of terror, as if she had seen the door of happiness close in her face. The day afterwards her regret would become almost unendurable, and her longing, which drowned every other interest or emotion, would overwhelm her, like a great flood which had swept away the natural boundaries of existence, and submerged alike the valleys and the peaks of her consciousness. Everything was deluged by it; everything surrendered to the torrent—even the past. Because she had once been hurt so deeply, she had believed that she could never be hurt in the same way again; but she discovered presently that what she had suffered yesterday had only taught her how to suffer more intensely to-day. Nothing had helped her—not blighted love, not disillusionment, not philosophy. All these had been swept like straws on the torrent from which she could not escape.

The days were long, but the nights were far longer, for, with the first fall of the darkness, her imagination was set free. While she was working with Margaret in the garden, or the kitchen, she could keep her mind on the object before her—she could plant or weed until her body ached from fatigue, and the soft air and the smell of earth and of lilacs, became intermingled. But it was worse in the slow, slow evenings, when the three of them sat and talked, with an interminable airy

chatter, before the wood-fire, or round the lamp, which still smoked. Then she would run on gaily, talking always against time, longing for the hour that would release her from the presence of the beings she loved best, while some memory of Blackburn glimmered in the fire, or in the old portraits, or through the windows, which looked, uncurtained, out on the stars. There were moments even when some quiver of expression on her mother's face or on Margaret's, some gleam of laughter or trick of gesture, would remind her of him. Then she would ask herself if it were possible that she had loved him before she had ever seen him, and afterwards at Briarlay, when she had believed herself to be so indifferent? And sitting close to her mother and sister, divided from them by an idea which was more impregnable than any physical barrier, she began to feel gradually that her soul was still left there in the house which her mind inhabited so persistently—that her real life, her vital and perpetual being, still went on there in the past, and that here, in the present, beside these dear ones, who loved her so tenderly, there was only a continuous moving shadow of herself. "But how do I know that these aren't the shadows of mother and of Margaret?" she would demand, startled out of her reverie.

At the end of a fortnight a letter came from Mrs. Timberlake, and she read it on the kitchen porch, where Perzelia, the field hand, was singing in a high falsetto, as she bent over the wash-tub.

"*We is jew-els—pre-cious—jew-els in—His—c-r-ow-n!*" sang Perzelia shrilly, and changing suddenly from hymn to sermon, "Yas, Lawd, I tells de worl'. I tells de worl' dat ef'n dat nigger 'oman don' stop 'er lies on me, I'se gwine ter cut 'er heart out. I'se gwine ter kill 'er

jes' de same ez I 'ould a rat. Yas, Lawd, I tells 'er dat. '*We is jew-els—pre-cious—jew-els in His c-r-o-w-n.*'"

Mrs. Timberlake wrote in her fine Italian hand:

My Dear Caroline,

I have thought of you very often, and wanted to write to you, but ever since you left we have been rather upset, and I have been too busy to settle down to pen and paper. For several weeks after you went away Letty was not a bit well. Nobody knew what was the matter with her, and Doctor Boland's medicine did not do her any good. She just seemed to peak and pine, and I said all along it was nothing in the world except missing you that made her sick. Now she is beginning to pick up as children will if you do not worry them too much, and I hope she will soon get her colour back and look as natural as she did while you were here. We have a new trained nurse—a Miss Bradley, from somewhere up in the Shenandoah Valley, but she is very plain and uninteresting, and, between you and me, I believe she bores Letty to death. I never see the child that she does not ask me, "When is Miss Meade coming back?"

We were very anxious to have a word from you after you went away. However, I reckon you felt as if you did not care to write, and I am sure I do not blame you. I suppose you have heard all the gossip that has been going on here—somebody must have written you, for somebody always does write when there is anything unpleasant to say. You know, of course, that Angelica left David the very day you went away, and the town has been fairly ringing with all sorts of dreadful scandals. People believe he was cruel to her, and that she bore his ill-treatment just as long as she could before leaving his house. Only you and I and Mammy Riah will ever know what really happened, and nobody would believe us if we were to come out and tell under oath—which, of course, we can never do. I cannot make out exactly what Angelica means to do, but she has gone

somewhere out West, and I reckon she intends to get a divorce and marry Alan, if he ever comes back from the war. You may not have heard that he has gone into the army, and I expect he will be among the very first to be sent to France. Roane is going, too. You cannot imagine how handsome he is in his uniform. He has not touched a drop since we went to war, and I declare he looks exactly like a picture of a crusader of the Middle Ages, which proves how deceptive the best appearances are.

David has not changed a particle through it all. You remember how taciturn he always was, and how he never let anybody even mention Angelica's name to him? Well, it is just the same now, and he is, if possible, more tight-lipped than ever. Nobody knows how he feels, or what he thinks of her behaviour—not even Colonel Ashburton, and you know what close and devoted friends they are. The Colonel told me that once, when he first saw how things were going, he tried to open the subject, and that he could never forget how Blackburn turned him off by talking about something that was way up in the air and had nothing to do with the subject. I am sure David has been cut to the heart, but he will never speak out, and everybody will believe that Angelica has been perfectly right in everything she has done. If it goes on long enough, she will even believe it herself, and that, I reckon, is the reason she is so strong, and always manages to appear sinned against instead of sinning. Nothing can shake her conviction that whatever she wants she ought to have.

Well, my dear, I must stop now and see about dinner. The house is so lonely, though, as far as I can tell, Letty hardly misses her mother at all, and this makes it so provoking when people like Daisy Colfax cry over the child in the street, and carry on about, "poor dear Angelica, who is so heartbroken." That is the way Daisy goes on whenever I see her, and it is what they are saying all over Richmond. They seem to think that

David is just keeping Letty out of spite, and I cannot make them believe that Angelica does not want her,and is glad to be relieved of the responsibility. When I say this they put it down as one of my peculiarities—like blinking eyes,or the habit of stuttering when I get excited.

Give my love to your mother, though I reckon she has forgotten old Matty Timberlake, and do drop me a line to let me hear how you are.

Your affectionate friend,

MATTY TIMBERLAKE.

Letty sends her dearest, dearest, dearest love.

When she had finished the letter, Caroline looked over the lilacs by the kitchen porch and the broken well-house, to the road beneath the aspens, which still led somewhere—somewhere—to the unattainable. At one corner of the porch Perzelia was singing again, and the sound mingled with the words that Mrs. Timberlake had written.

"*We is jew-els, pre-cious jew-els in His c-r-o-w-n.*"

A fever of restlessness seized Caroline while she listened. The letter, instead of quieting her, had merely sharpened the edge of her longing, and she was filled with hunger for more definite news. In an hour The Cedars had become intolerable to her. She felt that she could not endure another day of empty waiting—of waiting without hope—of the monotonous round of trivial details that led to nothing, of the perpetual, interminable effort to drug feeling with fatigue, to thrust the secondary interests and the things that did not matter into the foreground of her life. "He has never wasted a regret on me," she thought. "He never cared for a minute. I was nothing to him except a friend, a woman who could be trusted." The confession was

like the twist of a knife in her heart; and springing to her feet, she picked up the letter she had dropped, and ran into the house.

"I must go back to work, mother darling," she said. "The money I saved is all gone, and I must go back to work."

CHAPTER IX

The Years Ahead

Toward the close of an afternoon in November, Caroline was walking from the hospital to a boarding-house in Grace Street, where she was spending a few days between cases. All summer she had nursed in Richmond; and now that the autumn, for which she had longed, had at last come, she was beginning to feel the strain of hard work and sleepless nights. Though she still wore her air of slightly defiant courage, a close observer would have noticed the softer depths in her eyes, the little lines in her face, and the note of sadness that quivered now and then in her ready laughter. It was with an effort now that she moved with her energetic and buoyant step, for her limbs ached, and a permanent weariness pervaded her body.

A high wind was blowing, and from the scattered trees on the block, a few brown and wrinkled leaves were torn roughly, and then whirled in a cloud of dust up the street. The block ahead was deserted, except for an aged negro wheeling a handcart full of yellow chrysanthemums, but as Caroline approached the crossing, Daisy Colfax came suddenly from the corner of a church, and hesitated an instant before speaking. The last time that Caroline had seen her, old Mrs. Colfax had been in the car, and they had not spoken; but now that Daisy was alone, she pounced upon her with the manner of an affectionate and playful kitten.

"Oh, I didn't know you at first, Miss Meade! You are so much thinner. What have you been doing?"

She held out her hand, diffusing life, love, joy, with the warmth of her Southern charm; and while Caroline stood there, holding the soft, gloved hand in her own, a dart of envy pierced the armour of her suffering and her philosophy. How handsome Daisy looked! How happy! Her hat of the royal purple she favoured made her black hair gleam like velvet; her sealskin coat, with its enormous collar of ermine, wrapped her luxuriously from head to foot; her brilliant complexion had the glow of a peach that is just ready to drop. She also had had an unfortunate romance somewhere in the past; she had married a man whom she did not love; yet she shone, she scintillated, with the genuine lustre of happiness. Never had the superior advantages of a shallow nature appeared so incontestable.

"I saw you go by yesterday, Miss Meade, and I said to myself that I was going to stop and speak to you the first chance I got. I took such a fancy to you when you were out at Briarlay, and I want to tell you right now that I never believed there was anything queer in your going away like that so early in the morning, without saying a word to anybody. At first people didn't understand why you did it, and, of course, you know that somebody tried to start gossip; but as soon as Mrs. Timberlake told me your sister was ill, I went straight about telling everybody I saw. You were the last woman on earth, I always said, to want anything like a flirtation with a man, married or single, and I knew you used to sympathize *so* with Angelica. I shall never forget the way you looked at David Blackburn the night you came there, when he was so dreadfully

rude to her at the table. I told mother afterwards that if a look could have killed, he would have fallen dead on the spot." She paused an instant, adjusted a loosened pin in her lace veil, and glided on smoothly again without a perceptible change in her voice, "Poor, dear Angelica! All our hearts are broken over her. I never knew David Blackburn well, but I always despised him from the beginning. A man who will sit through a whole dinner without opening his mouth, as I've known him to do, is capable of anything. That's what I always say when Robert tells me I am prejudiced. I am really not in the least prejudiced, but I just can't abide him, and there's no use trying to make me pretend that I can. Even if he hadn't ruined Angelica's life, I should feel almost as strongly about him. Everybody says that she is going to get a divorce for cruelty, though one of the most prominent lawyers in town—I don't like to mention his name, but you would know it in a minute—told me that she could get it on *any* grounds that she chose. Angelica has such delicacy of feeling that she went out West, where you don't have to make everything so dreadfully public, and drag in all kinds of disgraceful evidence—but they say that David Blackburn neglected her from the very first, and that he has had affairs with other women for years and years. He must have selected those nobody had ever heard of, or he couldn't have kept it all so secret, and that only proves, as I said to Robert, that his tastes were always low——"

"Why do people like to believe these things?" demanded Caroline resentfully. "Why don't they try to find out the truth?"

"Well, how in the world are they going to find out

any more than they are told? I said that to Mrs. Ashburton—you know they stand up for Mr. Blackburn through thick and thin—but even they can't find a word to say against Angelica, except that she isn't sincere, and that she doesn't really care about Letty. There isn't a word of truth in that, and nobody would believe it who had seen Angelica after she told Letty good-bye. She was heartbroken—simply heartbroken. Her face was the loveliest thing I ever looked at, and, as Alan Wythe said to me the next day—it was the very afternoon before he went off to camp—there was the soul of motherhood in it. I thought that such a beautiful way of putting it, for it suited Angelica perfectly. Didn't you always feel that she was full of soul?"

"I wonder how Letty is getting on?" asked Caroline, in the pause. "Have you heard anything of her?"

"Oh, she is all right, I think. They have a nurse there who is looking after her until they find a good governess. She must miss her mother terribly, but she doesn't show it a bit. I must say she always seemed to me to be a child of very little feeling. If I go away for a week, my children cry their eyes out, and Letty has lost her mother, and no one would ever know it to watch her."

"She is a reserved child, but I am sure she has feeling," said Caroline.

"Of course you know her better than I do, and, anyhow, you couldn't expect a child not to show the effects of the kind of home life she has had. I tell Robert that our first duty in life is to provide the memory of a happy home for our children. It means so much when you're

grown, don't you think, to look back on a pleasant childhood? As for Letty she might as well be an orphan now that David Blackburn has gone to France——"

"To France?" For a minute it seemed to Caroline that claws were tearing her heart, and the dull ache which she had felt for months changed into a sharp and unendurable pain. Then the grey sky and grey street and grey dust intermingled, and went round and round in a circle.

"You hadn't heard? Why, he went last week, or it may be that he is going next week—I can't remember which. Robert didn't know exactly what he was to do —some kind of constructive work, he said, for the Government. I never get things straight, but all I know is that everything seems to be for the Government now. I declare, I never worked so hard in my life as I have done in the last six or eight months, and Robert has been in Washington simply slaving his head off for a dollar a year. It does one good, I suppose. Mr. Courtland preached a beautiful sermon last Sunday about it, and I never realized before how wonderfully we have all grown in spirit since the war began. I said to Mrs. Mallow, as I came out, that it was so comforting to feel that we had been developing all the time without knowing it, or having to bother about it. Of course, we did know that we had been very uncomfortable, but that isn't quite the same, and now I can stand giving up things so much better when I realize that I am getting them all back, even if it's just spiritually. Don't you think that is a lovely way to feel about it?"

"I must go," said Caroline breathlessly. Her pulses were hammering in her ears, and she could scarcely hear what Daisy was saying.

"Well, good-bye. I am so glad to have seen you. Are you going to France like everybody else?"

"I hope so. I have offered my services."

"Then you are just as wild about war work as I am. I'd give anything on earth to go over with the Y. M. C. A., and I tell Robert that the only thing that keeps me back is the children."

She floated on to her car at the corner, while Caroline crossed the street,and walked slowly in the direction of the boarding-house. "It can make no possible difference to me. Why should I care?" she asked herself. Yet the clutch of pain had not relaxed in her heart, and it seemed to her that all the life and colour had gone out of the town. He was not here. He was across the world. Until this instant she had not realized how much it meant to her that he should be in the same city, even though she never saw him.

She reached the house, opened the drab iron gate, went up the short brick walk between withered weeds, and rang the bell beside the inhospitable door, from which the sallow paint was peeling in streaks. At the third ring, a frowzy coloured maid, in a soiled apron, which she was still frantically tying, opened the door; and when she saw Caroline, a sympathetic grin widened her mouth.

"You is done hed a caller, en he lef' his name over dar on de table. I axed 'im ef'n he wouldn't set down en res' his hat, but he jes' shuck his haid en walked right spang out agin."

Entering the hall, Caroline picked up the card, and passed into the shabby living-room, which was empty during the afternoon hours. In the centre of the hideous room, with its damaged Victorian furniture, its

open stove, its sentimental engravings, and its piles of magazines long out of date—in the midst of the surroundings of a contented and tasteless period, she stared down, with incredulous eyes, at the bit of paper she was holding. So he had been there. He had come at the last moment, probably on his last day in Richmond, and she had missed him! Life had accorded her one other opportunity, and, with the relentless perversity of her fate, she had lost it by an accident, by a quarter of an hour, by a chance meeting with Daisy! It was her destiny to have the things that she desired held within reach, to watch them approach until she could almost touch them, to see them clearly and vividly for a minute, and then to have them withdrawn through some conspiracy of external events. "I didn't ask much," she thought, "only to see him once more—only the chance to let him see that I can still hold my head high and meet the future with courage." In an instant she felt that the utter futility and emptiness of the summer, of every day that she had passed since she left Briarlay, enveloped and smothered her with the thickness of ashes. "It is not fair," she cried,in rebellion, "I have had a hard life. I asked so little. It is not fair."

Going over to the window, she put the cheap curtains aside, and looked out into the street, as if searching the pavement for his vanishing figure. Nothing there except emptiness! Nothing except the wind and falling leaves and grey dust and the footsteps of a passer-by at the corner. It was like her life, that long, deserted street, filled with dead leaves and the restless sound of things that went by a little way off.

For a minute the idea stayed with her. Then, raising

her head, with a smile, she looked up at the bare trees and the sombre sky over the housetops. "Life cannot hurt you unless you let it," she repeated. "I will not let it. I will conquer, if it kills me." And, so inexplicable are the processes of the soul, the resolution arising in her thoughts became interfused not only with her point of view, but with the bleak external world at which she was looking. The will to fight endowed her with the physical power of fighting; the thought created the fact; and she knew that as long as she believed herself to be unconquered, she was unconquerable. The moment of weakness had served its purpose—for the reaction had taught her that destiny lies within, not without; that the raw material of existence does not differ; and that our individual lives depend, not upon things as they are in themselves, but upon the thought with which we have modified or enriched them. "I will not be a coward. I will not let the world cheat me of happiness," she resolved; and the next instant, as she lowered her eyes from the sky, she saw David Blackburn looking up at her from the gate.

For a moment she felt that life stopped in its courses, and then began again, joyously, exuberantly, drenched with colour and sweetness. She had asked so little. She had asked only to see him again—only the chance to show him that she could be brave—and he stood here at the gate! He was still her friend, that was enough. It was enough to have him stand there and look up at her with his grave, questioning eyes.

Turning quickly away from the window, she ran out of the house and down the brick walk to the gate.

"I thought I had missed you," she said, her eyes shining with happiness.

"It is my last day in Richmond. I wanted to say good-bye." He had touched her hand with the briefest greeting; but in his face she read his gladness at seeing her; and she felt suddenly that everything had been made right, that he would understand without words, that there was nothing she could add to the joy of the meeting. It was friendship, not love, she knew; and yet, at the moment, friendship was all that she asked—friendship satisfied her heart, and filled the universe with a miraculous beauty. After the torment of the last six months, peace had descended upon her abundantly, ineffably, out of the heavens. All the longing to explain faded now into the knowledge that explanation was futile, and when she spoke again it was to say none of the things with which she had burdened her mind.

"How is Letty?" she asked, "I think of her so often."

"She is very well, but she misses you. Will you walk a little way? We can talk better in the street."

"Yes, the house will soon be full of boarders." Weariness had left her. She felt strong, gay, instinct with energy. As she moved up the deserted street, through the autumn dust, laughter rippled on her lips, and the old buoyant grace flowed in her walk. It was only friendship, she told herself, and yet she asked nothing more. She had been born again; she had come to life in a moment.

And everything at which she looked appeared to have come to life also. The heavy clouds; the long, ugly street, with the monotonous footsteps of the few passers-by; the wind blowing the dried leaves in swirls and eddies over the brick pavement; the smell of autumn which lingered in the air and the dust—all

these things seemed not dead, but as living as spring. The inner radiance had streamed forth to brighten the outward greyness; the April bloom of her spirit was spreading over the earth.

"This is my hour," her heart told her. "Out of the whole of life I have this single short hour of happiness. I must pour into it everything that is mine, every memory of joy I shall ever have in the future. I must make it so perfect that it will shed a glow over all the drab years ahead. It is only friendship. He has never thought of me except as a friend—but I must make the memory of friendship more beautiful than the memory of love."

He looked at her in the twilight, and she felt that peace enveloped her with his glance.

"Tell me about yourself," he said gently. "What has life done to you?"

"Everything, and nothing." Her voice was light and cheerful. "I have worked hard all summer, and I am hoping to go to France if the war lasts——"

"All of us hope that. It is amazing the way the war has gripped us to the soul. Everything else becomes meaningless. The hold it has taken on me is so strong that I feel as if I were there already in part, as if only the shell of my body were left over here out of danger." He paused and looked at her closely. "I can talk to you of the things I think—impersonal things. The rest you must understand—you will understand?"

Her heart rose on wings like a bird. "Talk to me of anything," she answered, "I shall understand."

"No one, except my mother, has ever understood so completely. I shall always, whatever happens, look

back on our talks at Briarlay as the most helpful, the most beautiful of my life."

Her glance was veiled with joy as she smiled up at him. This was more than she had ever demanded even in dreams. It was the bread of life in abundance, and she felt that she could live on it through all the barren years of the future. To have the best in her recognized, to be judged, not by a momentary impulse, but by a permanent ideal—this was what she had craved, and this was accorded her.

"For the time I can see nothing but the war," he was saying in a changed voice. "The ground has been cut from under my feet. I am groping through a ruined world toward some kind of light, some kind of certainty. The things I believed in have failed me—and even the things I thought have undergone modifications. I can find but one steadfast resolve in the midst of this fog of disappointment, and that is to help fight this war to a finish. My personal life has become of no consequence. It has been absorbed into the national will, I suppose. It has become a part of America's determination to win the war, let it cost what it may."

The old light of vision and prophecy had come back to his face while she watched it; and she realized, with a rush of mental sympathy, that his ideas were still dynamic—that they possessed the vital energy of creative and constructive forces.

"Talk to me of your work—your life," she said, and she thought exultantly, "If I cannot hold him back, I can follow him. I, too, can build my home on ideas."

"You know what I have always felt about my country," he said slowly. "You know that I have always

hoped to be of some lasting service in building a better State. As a boy I used to dream of it, and in later years, in spite of disappointments—of almost unbearable disappointments and failures—the dream has come back more vividly. For a time I believed that I could work here, as well as away, for the future of America—for the genuine democracy that is founded not on force, but on freedom. For a little while this seemed to me to be possible. Then I was pushed back again from the ranks of the fighters—I became again merely a spectator of life—until the war called me to action. As long as the war lasts it will hold me. When that is over there will be fresh fields and newer problems, and I may be useful."

"It is constructive work, not fighting now, isn't it?"

"It is the machinery of war—but, after all, what does it matter if it only helps to win?"

"And afterwards? When it is over?"

His eyes grew very gentle. "If I could only see into the future! Words may come to me some day, and I may answer you—but not now—not yet. I know nothing to-day except that there is work for my hand, and I must do it. Trust me for the rest. You do trust me?"

There was a glory in her face as she answered, "To do right always. Until death—and beyond."

"If we have trust, we have everything," he said, and a note of sadness had crept into his voice. "Life has taught me that without it the rest is only ashes."

"I am glad for your sake that you can go," she replied. "It would be harder here."

The man's part was his, and though she would not have had it otherwise, she understood that the man's part would be the easier. He would go away; he would

do his work; his life would be crowded to the brim with incident, with practical interests; and, though she could trust him not to forget, she knew that he would not remember as she remembered in the place where she had known him.

"The work will be worth doing," he answered, "even if the record is soon lost. It will mean little in the way of ambition, but I think that ambition scarcely counts with me now. What I am seeking is an opportunity for impersonal service—a wider field in which to burn up my energy." His voice softened, and she felt, for the first time, that he was talking impersonally because he was afraid of the danger that lay in the silence and the twilight—that he was speaking in casual phrases because the real thought, the true words, were unutterable. She was sure now, she was confident; and the knowledge gave her strength to look with clear eyes on the parting—and afterwards——

He began to talk of his work, while they turned and walked slowly back to the boarding-house.

"I will write to you," he said, "but remember I shall write only of what I think. I shall write the kind of letters that I should write to a man."

"It all interests me," she answered. "Your thought is a part of you—it is yourself."

"It is the only self I dare follow for the present, and even that changes day by day. I see so many things now, if not differently—well, at least in an altered perspective. It is like travelling on a dark road, as soon as one danger is past, others spring up out of the obscurity. The war has cast a new light on every belief, on every conviction that I thought I possessed. The values of life are changing hourly—they are in a process

of readjustment. Facts that appeared so steadfast, so clear, to my vision a year ago, are now out of focus. I go on, for I always sought truth, not consistency, but I go on blindly. I am trying to feel the road since I cannot see it. I am searching the distance for some glimmer of dawn—for some light I can travel by. I know, of course, that our first task is winning the war, that until the war is won there can be no security for ideas or mankind, that unless the war is won, there can be no freedom for either individual or national development."

As they reached the gate, he broke off, and held out his hand. "But I meant to write you all this. It is the only thing I can write you. You will see Letty sometimes?"

"Whenever I can. Mrs. Timberlake will bring her to see me."

"And you will think of yourself? You will keep well?"

He held her hand; her eyes were on his; and though she heard his questions and her answers, she felt that both questions and answers were as trivial as the autumn dust at her feet. What mattered was the look in his eyes, which was like a cord drawing her spirit nearer and nearer. She knew now that he loved her; but she knew it through some finer and purer medium of perception than either speech or touch. If he had said nothing in their walk together, if he had parted from her in silence, she would have understood as perfectly as she understood now. In that moment, while her hand was in his and her radiant look on his face, the pain and tragedy of the last months, the doubt, the humiliation, the haunting perplexity and suspense,

the self-distrust and the bitterer distrust of life—all these things, which had so tormented her heart, were swept away by a tide of serene and ineffable peace. She was not conscious of joy. The confidence that pervaded her spirit was as far above joy as it was above pain or distress. What she felt with the profoundest conviction was that she could never really be unhappy again in the future—that she had had all of life in a moment, and that she could face whatever came with patience and fortitude.

"Stand fast, little friend," he said, "and trust me." Then, without waiting for her reply, he turned from her and walked away through the twilight.

CHAPTER X

The Light on the Road

When Caroline entered the house, the sound of clinking plates and rattling knives told her that the boarders had already assembled at supper; and it surprised her to discover that she was hungry for the first time in months. Happiness had made everything different, even her appetite for the commonplace fare Mrs. Dandridge provided. It was just as if an intense physical pain had suddenly ceased to throb, and the relief exhilarated her nerves, and made her eager for the ordinary details which had been so irksome a few hours before. Life was no longer distorted and abnormal. Her pride and courage had come back to her; and she understood at last that it was not the unfulfilment of love, but the doubt of its reality, that had poisoned her thoughts. Since she knew that it was real, she could bear any absence, any pain. The knowledge that genuine love had been hers for an hour, that she had not been cheated out of her heritage, that she had not given gold for sand, as she had done as a girl—the knowledge of these things was the chain of light that would bind together all the dull years before her. Already, though her pulses were still beating rapturously, she found that the personal values were gradually assuming their right position and importance in her outlook. There were greater matters, there were more significant facts in the world to-day than her own particular joy or sorrow. She

must meet life, and she must meet it with serenity and fortitude. She must help where the immediate need was, without thought of the sacrifice, without thought even of her own suffering. How often in the past eight years had she told herself, "Love is the greatest good in the world, but it is not the only good. There are lives filled to overflowing in which love has no place." Now she realized that her love must be kept like some jewel in a secret casket, which was always there, always hidden and guarded, yet seldom brought out into the daylight and opened. "I must think of it only for a few minutes of the day," she said, "only when I am off duty, and it will not interfere with my work." And she resolved that she would keep this pledge with all the strength of her will. She would live life whole, not in parts.

Without taking off her hat, she went into the dining-room, and tried to slip unnoticed into her chair at a small table in one corner. The other seats were already occupied, and a pretty, vivacious girl she had known at the hospital, looked up and remarked, "You look so well, Miss Meade. Have you been for a walk?"

"Yes, I've been for a walk. That is why I am late."

Down the centre of the room, beneath the flickering gas chandelier and the fly-specked ceiling, there was a long, narrow table, and at the head of it, Mrs. Dandridge presided with an air as royal as if she were gracing a banquet. She was a stately, white-haired woman, who had once been beautiful and was still impressive—for adversity, which had reduced her circumstances and destroyed her comfort, had failed to penetrate the majestic armour of her manner. In the midst of drudgery and turmoil and disaster, she had

preserved her mental poise as some persons are able to preserve their equilibrium in a rocking boat. Nothing disturbed her; she was as superior to accidents as she was to inefficiency or incompetence. Her meals were never served at the hour; the food was badly cooked; the table was seldom tidy; and yet her house was always crowded, and there was an unimpeachable tradition that she had never received a complaint from a boarder.

As she sat now at the head of her unappetizing table, eating her lukewarm potato soup as if it were terrapin, she appeared gracious, charming, supported by the romantic legends of her beauty and her aristocratic descent. If life had defeated her, it was one of those defeats which the philosopher has pronounced more triumphant than victories.

"I spent the afternoon at the Red Cross rooms," she remarked, regal, serene, and impoverished. "That is why supper was a little late to-night. Since I can give nothing else, I feel that it is my duty to give my time. I even ask myself sometimes if I have a moral right to anything we can send over to France?"

Inadvertently, or through some instinct of tact which was either divine or diabolical, she had touched a responsive cord in the heart of every man or woman at the table. There was no motive beyond impulsive sympathy in the words, for she was as incapable of deliberate design as she was of systematic economy; but her natural kindliness appeared to serve her now more effectively than any Machiavellian subtlety could have done. The discontented and dejected look vanished from the faces about her; the distinguished widow, with two sons in the army, stopped frowning at the potato soup; the hungry but polite young man, who travelled for a

clothing house, put down the war bread he was in the act of passing; and the studious-looking teacher across the table lost the critical air with which she had been regarding the coloured waitress. As Caroline watched the change, she asked herself if the war, which was only a phrase to these people a few months ago, had become at last a reality? "We are in it now, body and soul," she thought, "we are in it just as France and England have been in it from the beginning. It is our war as much as theirs because it has touched our hearts. It has done what nothing has been able to do before—it has made us one people."

Into these different faces at Mrs. Dandridge's table, a single idea had passed suddenly, vitalizing and ennobling both the bright and the dull features—the idea of willing sacrifice. Something greater than selfish needs or desires had swept them out of themselves on a wave of moral passion that, for the moment, exalted them like a religious conversion. What had happened, Caroline knew, was that the patriotism in one of the most patriotic nations on earth had been stirred to the depths.

The talk she heard was the kind that was going on everywhere. She had listened to it day after day, as it echoed and re-echoed from the boarding-houses, the hospitals, and the streets—and through the long, bitter months, when coal was scarce and heatless and meatless days kept the blood down, she was aware of it, as of a persistent undercurrent of cheerful noise. There were no complaints, but there were many jests, and the characteristic Virginian habit of meeting a difficult situation with a joke, covered the fuel administration with ridicule. For weeks ice lay on the pavements, a famine in

coal threatened; and as the winter went by, bread, instead of growing better, became steadily worse. But, after all, people said, these discomforts and denials were so small compared to the colossal sacrifices of Europe. Things were done badly, but what really counted was that they were done. Beneath the waste and extravagance and incompetence, a tremendous spirit was moving; and out of the general aspect of bureaucratic shiftlessness, America was gathering her strength. In the future, as inevitably as history develops from a fact into a fable, the waste would be exalted into liberality, the shiftlessness into efficiency. For it is the law of our life that the means pass, and the end remains, that the act decays, but the spirit has immortality.

For the next six months, when the calls were many and nurses were few, Caroline kept her jewel in the secret casket. She did not think of herself,because to think of herself was the beginning of weakness, and she had resolved long ago to be strong. When all was said, the final result of her life depended simply on whether she overcame obstacles or succumbed to them. It was not the event, she knew, that coloured one's mental atmosphere; it was the point of view from which one approached it. "It is just as easy to grow narrow and bitter over an unfulfilled love as it is to be happy and cheerful," she thought, "and whether it is easy or not, I am not going to let myself grow narrow and bitter. Of course, I might have had more, but, then, I might have had so much less—I might not have had that one hour—or his friendship. I am going to be thankful that I have had so much, and I am going to stop thinking about it at all. I may feel all I want to deep down in my soul, but I must stop thinking. When the whole

country is giving up something, I can at least give up selfish regret."

The winter passed, filled with work, and not unhappily, for time that is filled with work is seldom unhappy. From Blackburn she had heard nothing, though in April a paragraph in the newspaper told her that Angelica was about to sue for a divorce in some Western state; and Daisy Colfax, whom she met one day in the waiting-room of the hospital, breezily confirmed the vague announcement.

"There really wasn't anything else that she could do, you know. We were all expecting it. Poor Angelica, she must have had to overcome all her feelings before she could make up her mind to take a step that was so public. Her delicacy is the most beautiful thing about her—except, as Robert always insists, the wonderful way she has of bringing out the best in people."

As the irony of this was obviously unconscious, Caroline responded merely with a smile; but that same afternoon, when Mrs. Timberlake paid one of her rare visits, she repeated Daisy's remark.

"Do you suppose she really believes what she says?"

"Of course she doesn't. Things don't stop long enough in her mind to get either believed or disbelieved. They just sift straight through without her knowing that they are there."

They were in the ugly little green-papered room at the hospital, and Caroline was holding Letty tight in her arms, while she interpolated cryptic phrases into the animated talk.

"Oh, Miss Meade, if you would only come back! Do you think you will come back when mother and father get home again? I wrote to father the other

day, but I had to write in pencil, and I'm so afraid it will all fade out when it goes over the ocean. Will it get wet, do you think?"

"I am sure it won't, dear, and he will be so glad to hear from you. What did you tell him?"

"I told him how cold it was last winter, and that I couldn't write before because doing all the doctor told me took up every single minute, and I had had to leave off my lessons, and that the new nurse made them very dull, anyhow. Then I said that I wanted you to come back, and that I hadn't been nearly so strong since you went away."

She was looking pale, and after a few moments, Caroline sent her, with a pot of flowers, into an adjoining room.

"I don't like Letty's colour," she said anxiously to the housekeeper, in the child's absence.

"She is looking very badly. It is the hard winter, I reckon, but I am not a bit easy about her. She hasn't picked up after the last cold, and we don't seem able to keep her interested. Children are so easily bored when they are kept indoors, and Letty more easily than most, for she has such a quick mind. I declare I never lived through such a winter—at least not since I was a child in the Civil War, and of course that was a thousand times worse. But we couldn't keep Briarlay warm, even the few rooms that we lived in. It was just like being in prison—and a cold one at that! I can't help wishing that David would come home, for I feel all the time as if anything might happen. I reckon the winter put my nerves on edge; but the war seems to drag on so slowly, and everybody has begun to talk in such a pessimistic way. It may sound un-Christian, but I

sometimes feel as if I could hardly keep my hands off the Germans. I get so impatient of the way things are going, I'd like to get over in France, and kill a few of them myself. It does look, somehow, as if the Lord had forgotten that vengeance belongs to Him."

"Doctor Boland told me yesterday that he thought it would last at least five years longer."

"Then it will outlast us, that's all I've got to say." She cleared her throat, and added with tart irrelevancy, "I had a letter from Angelica a few weeks ago."

"Is it true? What the paper said?"

"There wasn't a word about it in the letter. She wrote because she wanted me to send her some summer clothes she had left here, and then she asked me to let her know about Letty. She said she had been operated on in Chicago a month ago, and that she was just out of the hospital, and feeling like the wreck of herself. Everybody told her, she added, how badly she looked, and the letter sounded as if she were very much depressed and out of sorts."

"Do you think she may really have cared for Mr. Wythe?"

Mrs. Timberlake shook her head. "It wasn't that, my dear. She just couldn't bear to think of Mary's having more than she had. If she had ever liked David, it might have been easier for her to stand it, but she never liked him even when she married him; and though a marriage may sometimes manage very well without love, I've yet to see one that could get along without liking."

She rose as Letty came back from her errand, and a minute or two later, Caroline tucked the child in the car, and stood watching while it started for Briarlay.

The air was mild and fragrant, for after the hard, cold winter, spring had returned with a profusion of flowers. In the earth, on the trees, and in the hearts of men and women, April was bringing warmth, hope, and a restoration of life. The will to be, to live, and to struggle, was released, with the flowing sap, from the long imprisonment of winter. In the city yards the very grass appeared to shoot up joyously into the light, and the scent of hyacinths was like the perfume of happiness. The afternoon was as soft as a day in summer, and this softness was reflected in the faces of the people who walked slowly, filled with an unknown hope, through the warm sunshine.

"Love is the greatest good in the world, but it is not the only good," repeated Caroline, wondering who had first said the words.

It was then, as she turned back to enter the hospital, that the postman put some letters into her hand, and looking down, she saw that one was from Blackburn.

CHAPTER XI

The Letter

For the rest of the afternoon she carried the letter hidden in her uniform, where, from time to time, she could pause in her task, and put her hand reassuringly on the edge of the envelope. Not until evening, when she had left her patient and was back in her room, did she unfold the pages, and begin slowly to read what he had written. The first sentences, as she had expected, were stiff and constrained—she had known that until he could speak freely he would speak no word of love to her—but, as soon as he had passed from the note of feeling to the discussion of impersonal issues, he wrote as earnestly and spontaneously as he had talked to Sloane on that October afternoon at Briarlay. Another woman, she realized, might have been disappointed; but the ironic past had taught her that emotion, far from being the only bond with a man like Blackburn, was perhaps the least enduring of the ties that held them together. His love, if it ever came to her, would be the flower, not of transient passion, but of the profound intellectual sympathy which had first drawn their minds, not their hearts, to each other. Both had passed through the earlier fires of racial impulse; both had been scorched, not warmed by the flames; and both had learned that the only permanent love is the love that is rooted as deeply in thought as in desire.

In France.

My dear Caroline:

I have tried to write to you many times, but always something has held me back—some obscure feeling that words would not help things or make them easier, and that your friendship could be trusted to understand all that I was obliged to leave to the silence. You will see how badly I have put this, even though I have rewritten the beginning of this letter several times. But it is just as if I were mentally tongue-tied. I can think of nothing to say that it does not seem better to leave unsaid. Then I remembered that when we parted I told you I should write of what I thought, not of what I felt, and this makes it simpler. When I relax my mental grip, the drift of things whirls like a snowstorm across my mind, and I grow confused and bewildered——

In the last year I have thought a great deal about the questions before us. I have tried to look at them from a distance and on the outside, as well as from a closer point of view. I have done my best to winnow my convictions from the ephemeral chaff of opinions; and though I am groping still, I am beginning to see more clearly the road we must travel, if we are ever to come out of the jungle of speculation into the open field of political certainty. Behind us—behind America, for it is of my own country that I am thinking—the way is strewn with experiments that have met failure, with the bones of political adventurers who have died tilting at the windmill of opportunity. For myself, I see now that, though some of my theories have survived, many of them have been modified or annulled by the war. Two years ago you heard me tell Sloane that our most urgent need was of unity—the obliteration of sectional lines. I still feel this need, but I feel it now as a necessary part of a far greater unity, of the obliteration of world boundaries of understanding and sympathy. This brings us to the vital question before us as a people—the development of the

individual citizen within the democracy, of the national life within the international. Here is the problem that America must solve for the nations, for only America, with her larger views and opportunities, can solve it. For the next generation or two this will be our work, and our chance of lasting service. Our Republic must stand as the great example of the future, as the morning star that heralds the coming of a new day. It is the cause for which our young men have died. With their lives they have secured our democracy, and the only reward that is worthy of them is a social order as fair as their loyalty and their sacrifice.

And so we approach our great problem—individuality within democracy, the national order within the world order. Already the sectional lines, which once constituted an almost insurmountable obstacle, have been partly dissolved in the common service and sacrifice. Already America is changing from a mass of divergent groups, from a gathering of alien races, into a single people, one and indivisible in form and spirit. The war has forged us into a positive entity, and this entity we must preserve as far as may be compatible with the development of individual purpose and character. Here, I confess, lies the danger; here is the political precipice over which the governments of the past have almost inevitably plunged to destruction. And it is just here, I see now, in the weakest spot of the body politic, that the South, and the individualism of the South, may become, not a national incubus, but the salvation of our Republic. The spirit that fought to the death fifty years ago for the sovereignty of the States, may act to-day as a needed check upon the opposing principle of centralization in government, the abnormal growth of Federal power; and in the end may become, like the stone which the builders rejected, the very head of the corner. As I look forward to-day, the great hope for America appears to be the interfusion of the Northern belief in solidarity with the ardent Southern faith in personal independence and responsibility. In

this blending of ideals alone, I see the larger spirit that may redeem nationality from despotism.

I am writing as the thoughts rush through my mind, with no effort to clarify or co-ordinate my ideas. From childhood my country has been both an ideal and a passion with me; and at this hour, when it is facing new dangers, new temptations, and new occasions for sacrifice, I feel that it is the duty of every man who is born with the love of a soil in his heart and brain, to cast his will and his vision into the general plan of the future. To see America avoid alike the pitfall of arbitrary power and the morass of visionary socialism; to see her lead the nations, not in the path of selfish conquest, but, with sanity and prudence, toward the promised land of justice and liberty—this is a dream worth living for, and worth dying for, God knows, if the need should ever arise.

The form of government which will yield us this ideal union of individualism with nationalism, I confess, lies still uninvented or undiscovered. Autocracies have failed, and democracies have been merely uncompleted experiments. The republics of the past have served mainly as stepping-stones to firmer autocracies or oligarchies. Socialism as a state of mind, as a rule of conduct, as an expression of pity for the disinherited of the earth—Socialism as the embodiment of the humane idea, is wholly admirable. So far as it is an attempt to establish the reign of moral ideas, to apply to the community the command of Christ, 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them;' so far as it expresses the obscure longing in the human heart for justice and right in the relations of mankind—so far as it embodies the instincts of compassion and sympathy, it must win the approval of every man who has looked deeply into human affairs. The evil of Socialism lies not in these things; nor does it rest in the impracticability of its theory—in the generous injustice of "robbing the rich to pay the poor." The evil of it consists in the fact that it would lend itself in practice even more readily than

democracy, to the formation of that outer crust of officialism which destroys the blood and fibre of a nation. Socialism obeying the law of Christ might be a perfect system—but, then, so would despotism, or democracy, or any other form of government man has invented.

But all theories, however exalted, must filter down, in application, through the brackish stream of average human nature. The State cannot rest upon a theory, any more than it can derive its true life from the empty husks of authority. The Republic of man, like the Kingdom of God, is within, or it is nowhere.

To-day, alone among the nations, the American Republic stands as the solitary example of a State that came into being, not through the predatory impulse of mankind, but, like its Constitution, as an act of intellectual creation. In this sense alone it did not grow, it was made; in this sense it was founded, not upon force, but upon moral ideas, upon everlasting and unchanging principles. It sprang to life in the sunrise of liberty, with its gaze on the future—on the long day of promise. It is the heir of all the ages of political experiment; and yet from the past, it has learned little except the things that it must avoid.

There was never a people that began so gloriously, that started with such high hearts and clear eyes toward an ideal social contract. Since then we have wandered far into the desert. We have followed mirage after mirage. We have listened to the voice of the false prophet and the demagogue. Yet our Republic is still firm, embedded, as in a rock, in the moral sense of its citizens. For a democracy, my reason tells me, there can be no other basis. When the State seeks other authority than the conscience of its citizens, it ceases to be a democracy, and becomes either an oligarchy or a bureaucracy. Then the empty forms of hereditary right, or established officialdom, usurp the sovereignty of moral ideas, and the State decays gradually because the reservoir of its life has run dry.

For our Republic, standing as it does between hidden precipices, the immediate future is full of darkness. We have shown the giant's strength, and we must resist the temptation to use it like a giant. When the war is won, we shall face the vital and imminent danger, the danger that is not material, but spiritual—for what shall it profit a nation, if it shall gain the whole world, and lose its own soul? In a time of danger arbitrary power wears always a benevolent aspect; and since man first went of his own will into bondage, there has never been absolutism on earth that has not masqueraded in the doctrine of divine origin—whether it be by the custom of kingship, or by the voice of the people. War, which is an abnormal growth on the commonwealth, may require abnormal treatment; but history shows that it is easier to surrender rights in war than it is to recover them in peace, and a temporary good has too often developed into a permanent evil. The freedom of the seas will be a poor substitute for the inalienable rights of the individual American. A League of Nations cannot insure these; it is doubtful even if it can insure peace on earth and good will toward men. Men can hate as bitterly and fight as fiercely within a league as outside of one.

We shall go forth, when victory is won, to enlighten the world with liberty and with far-seeing statesmanship; but just as the far-sighted physical vision perceives distant objects more clearly than near ones, there is, also, a world vision of duty which overlooks immediate obligations while it discerns universal responsibilities. In this mental view the present is invariably sacrificed to the future, the personal rights to the general security. Yet to the more normal faculty of vision, it would appear that the perfect whole must result from the perfect parts; and that only by preserving our individual liberties can we make a League of Free Nations. International treaties are important, but national morality is vital—for the treaty that is not confirmed by the national honour is only a document.

And now, after a year's thinking, I have come back to the conviction from which I started—that the only substantial groundwork of a republic is the conscience of its citizens. The future of our democracy rests not in the Halls of Congress, but in the cradle; and to build for permanency, we must build, not on theory, but on personal rectitude. We hear a great deal said now, and said unthinkingly, about the personal values not counting in a war that is fought for world freedom. Yet there was never an age, and I say this with certainty, in which personality was of such supreme significance as it is to-day. For this, after all, is the end to which my thinking has brought me—nationalism is nothing, internationalism is nothing, unless it is an expression of individual aspirations and ideals—for the end of both nationalism and internationalism is the ultimate return to racial character. Cultivate the personal will to righteousness, teach the citizen that he is the State, and the general good may take care of itself.

And so our first duty appears to be, not national expansion, but the development of moral fibre. Before we teach other nations to stand alone, we must learn to walk straight; before we sow the seeds of the future, we must prepare our own ground for planting. National greatness is a flower that has often flourished over a sewer of class oppression and official corruption; and the past teaches us that republics, as well as autocracies, may be founded on slavery and buttressed by inequalities. As I look ahead now, I see that we may win freedom for smaller nations, and yet lose our own liberties to a Federal power that is supported by a civilian army of office-holders. For power is never more relentless in exercise than when it has transformed the oppressed of yesterday into the oppressors of to-day; and it is well to remember that democracy means not merely the tyranny of the many instead of the few; it means equal obligations and responsibilities as well as equal rights and opportunities. If we have failed to reach this ideal, it has been because the individual

American has grasped at opportunity while he evaded responsibility; and the remedy for the failure lies not in a change of institutions, but in a change of heart. We must realize that America is a faith as well as a fact—that it is, for many, a divine hypothesis. We must realize that it means the forward-looking spirit, the fearless attitude of mind, the belief in the future, the romantic optimism of youth, the will to dare and the nerve to achieve the improbable. This is America, and this is our best and greatest gift to the world—and to the League of Free Nations.

With the end of the war the danger will be threatening; and we must meet it as we met the feebler menace of Prussian militarism—but we must meet it and conquer it with intangible weapons. No nation has ever fought for a greater cause; no nation has ever fought more unselfishly; and no nation has ever drawn its sword in so idealistic a spirit. We have entered this war while our hearts were full, while the high and solemn mood was upon us. If we keep to this mood, if we seek in victory the immaterial, not the material advantage, if our only reward is the opportunity for world service, and our only conquered territory the provinces of the free spirit—if we keep fast to this ideal, and embody its meaning in our national life and actions, then we may save the smaller nations because we have first saved our Republic. For, if it is a day of peril, it is also a day of glory. The seal of blood is upon us, but it is the prophetic mark of the future, and it has sealed us for the union of justice with liberty. We have given our dead as a pledge of the greater America—the America of invisible boundaries. There is but one monument that we can build in remembrance, and that monument is a nobler Republic. If we lose the inspiration of the ideal, if we turn aside from the steady light of democracy to pursue the *ignis fatuus* of imperialistic enterprise or aggression, then our dead will have died in vain, and we shall leave our building unfinished. For those who build on the dead must build for immortality.

Physical boundaries cannot contain them; but in the soul of the people, if we make room for them, they will live on forever, and in the spirit we may still have part and place with them.

And because the collective soul of the race is only the sum total of individual souls, I can discern no way to true national greatness except through the cultivation of citizenship. Experience has proved that there can be no stability either of law or league unless it is sustained by the moral necessity of mankind; and, for this reason, I feel that our first international agreement should be the agreement on a world standard of honour —on a rule of ethical principles in public as well as in private relations. I confess that a paternalism that enfeebles the character appears to me scarcely less destructive than a license that intoxicates. Between the two lies the golden mean of power with charity, of enlightened individualism, of Christian principles, not applied on the surface, but embodied in the very structure of civilization. Though I am not a religious man in the orthodox meaning, the last year has taught me that the world's hope lies not in treaties, but in the law of Christ that ye love one another.

This splendid dream of the perfectibility of human nature may not have led us very far in the past, but at least it has never once led us wrong. There are ideas that flash by like comets, bearing a trail of light; and such an idea is that of world peace and brotherhood. Only those whose eyes are on the heavens behold it; yet these few may become the great adventurers of the spirit, the prophets and seers of the new age for mankind. There has never been a great invention that did not begin as a dream, just as there has never been a great truth that did not begin as a heresy. And, if we look back over history, we find that the sublime moments with men and with nations, are those in which they break free from the anchorage of the past, and set sail toward the unknown seas, on a new spiritual voyage of discovery.

It is thus that I would see America, not as schoolmistress or common scold to the nations, but as chosen leader by example, rather than by authority. I would see her, when this crisis is safely past, keeping still to her onward vision, and her high and solemn mood of service and sacrifice; and it is in the spirit of humility, not of pride, that I would have her stretch the hand of friendship alike to the great and the little peoples. She has had no wiser leaders than the Founders of this Republic, and I would see her return, as far as she can return, to the lonely freedom in which they left her. I would see her enter no world covenant except one that is sustained not by physical force, but by the moral law; and I would, above all, see her follow her own great destiny with free hands and unbandaged eyes. For her true mission is not that of universal pedagogue—her true mission is to prove to the incredulous Powers the reality of her own political ideals—to make Democracy, not a sublime postulate, but a self-evident truth.

I have written as words came to me, knowing that I could write to you freely and frankly, as I could to no one else, of the life of the mind. Your friendship I can trust always, in any circumstances; and it is only by thinking impersonally that I can escape the tyranny of personal things. I have not written of my surroundings over here, because I could tell you only what you have read in hundreds of letters—in hundreds of magazines. It is all alike. One and all, we see the same sights. War is not the fine and splendid thing some of us at home believe it to be. There is dirt and cruelty and injustice in France, as well as glory and heroism. I have seen the good and the evil of the battlefields, just as I have seen the good and the evil of peace, and I have learned that the romance of war depends as much upon the thickness of the atmosphere as upon the square miles of the distance. It is pretty prosaic at close range; yet at the very worst of it, I have seen flashes of an almost inconceivable beauty. For it brings one

up against the reality, and the reality is not matter, but spirit.

I am trying to do the best work of my life, and I am doing it just for my country.

God bless you.

DAVID BLACKBURN.

CHAPTER XII

The Vision

At the end of June, Caroline learned from the papers that Blackburn had returned to Briarlay; and the same day she heard through Daisy Colfax that Alan Wythe had been killed in France.

"I feel so sorry for poor Angelica," said the young woman mournfully. "They were always such devoted friends. But, of course, it is splendid to think that he was a hero, and I know that is the way Angelica will look at it."

At the moment, though Caroline had liked Alan, the thing that impressed her most was the way in which the whole world shared in the conspiracy to protect Angelica from the consequences of her own acts. Evidently no hint of scandal had ever touched her friendship for Alan.

"I am sorry," said Caroline, "I always liked him."

"Oh, everybody did! You know that Mr. Blackburn has come home?"

"Yes, I saw it in the paper."

"And Cousin Matty tells me that you are going away to camp?"

"I have just had my call, and I am leaving next week. I hope it means France very soon, but of course no one knows."

"Well, be sure to take a great deal more than they tell you to. I know a nurse who said she almost froze

the first winter. Do you really have to wear woollen stockings? I should think they would make your flesh creep."

She passed on, blooming and lovely, and Caroline, with her bundle of woollen stockings under her arm, left the shop, and turned down a side street on her way to Mrs. Dandridge's. She was glad of the call, and yet—and yet—she had hoped deep down in her heart, a hope unspoken and unacknowledged, that she should see David again before she left Richmond. A moment would be enough—only it might be for the last time, and she felt that she must see him. In the last two months she had thought of him very little. Her work had engrossed her, and the hope of going to France had exhilarated her like wine through all the long days of drudgery. She had grown to expect so little of life that every pleasure was magnified into a blessing, and she found, in looking back, that an accumulation of agreeable incidents had provided her with a measure of happiness Underneath it all was the knowledge of Blackburn, though love had come at last to take the place of a creed that one believes in, but seldom remembers. Yet she still kept the jewel in the casket, and it was only when she stopped now and then to reflect on her life, that she realized how long it had lain in its secret corner where the light of day never shone.

As she approached the boarding-house she saw a car by the sidewalk, and a minute afterwards, Mrs. Timberlake turned away from the door, and came down to the gate.

"Oh, Caroline, I was afraid I had missed you! Are you going very soon?"

"Not until next week." Did the housekeeper hear, she wondered, the wild throbbing of her heart?

"I came to see if you could come out for the night? Letty has been ailing for several days, and the doctor says she has a touch of fever. Miss Bradley is ill in bed, and we can't get a nurse anywhere until to-morrow. Of course Mammy Riah and I can manage, but David and I would both feel so much easier if you would come."

"Of course, I'll come. I'll get my bag in a minute. It is already packed." Without waiting for Mrs. Timberlake's reply, she ran into the house, and came out with the suitcase in her hands. "Tell me about Letty. Is her temperature high?"

"It has been all day, but you know how it is with children, as I told David this morning. You heard that David was back?"

"I saw it in the paper."

"He came very unexpectedly. Of course he couldn't cable about the boat, and the telegram he sent from New York didn't get to me until after he was in the house. He is looking badly, but I am sure it isn't the work. I believe other things have been worrying him."

The car had passed out of Grace Street, and was running in the direction of Monument Avenue. As they went on, Caroline remembered the April morning when she had come in this same car down the familiar street, where flags were flying so gaily. It seemed a hundred years ago—not one year, but a hundred! Life was the same, and yet not the same, since the very heart of it was altered. The same sky shone, deeply blue, overhead; the same sun illuminated the houses; the same flags were flying; the same persons passed under the glittering

green of the leaves. It was all just as it had been on that April morning—and yet how different!

"I suppose he is anxious about Letty?" she said.

"Even before that I noticed how much he had changed. It was only when he was telling me about Roane that he looked a bit like himself. My dear, can you believe that Roane has really turned into a hero?"

"No, I cannot. It must have been a long turning." She was talking only to make sound. How could it matter to her what Roane had turned into?

"He's been fighting with the French, and David says he's won every decoration they have to give. He is doing splendid things, like saving lives under fire, and once he even saved a Red Cross dog at the risk of his life. David says it's the way he makes a jest of it that the French like—as if he were doing it for amusement. That's like Roane Fitzhugh, isn't it? What do you suppose David meant when he said that beneath it all was a profound disillusionment?"

"I don't know, but I never denied that Roane had a sense of humour."

"You never liked him, and neither did David. He says now that Roane isn't really any more of a hero than he always was, but that he has found a background where his single virtue is more conspicuous than his collective vices. I believe he is the only human being I ever knew David to be unjust to."

Caroline laughed. "There are some virtues it is simply impossible to believe in. Whenever I hear of Roane Fitzhugh—even when I hear things like this—I always remember that he kissed me when he was drunk."

"He hasn't touched a drop since the war. David

says he is getting all the excitement he wants in other ways."

"And I suppose when the war is over he'll have to get it again from drink." It didn't make any difference whether he was a hero or not, she told herself, she should always feel that way about him. After all, he was probably not the first hero who had given a woman good cause to despise him.

"Oh, I hope not!" Unlike Caroline, the housekeeper had always had a weakness for Roane, though she disapproved of his habits. But a good man, she often said to herself in excuse, might have bad habits, just as a bad man might have good ones. The Lord would have to find something else to judge people by at the day of reckoning. "He is the only man I've ever known who could see through Angelica," she concluded after a pause.

"He began early. She always got everything he wanted when they were children. I've heard him say so."

"Well, I wrote to him about her the other day. Did I tell you I'd heard from Cousin Fanny Baylor, who has been with her in Chicago?"

"No, you didn't tell me. How long ago was it?"

"It couldn't have been more than three weeks. She wrote me that Angelica was only the wreck of herself, and that the operation was really much more serious than we had ever been told. The doctor said there was no hope of any permanent cure, though she might linger on, as an invalid, for a good many years."

"And does she know? Mrs. Blackburn, I mean?"

"They wouldn't tell her. Cousin Fanny said the doctors and nurses had all been so careful to keep it

from her, and that the surgeon who operated said he could not strike hope out of Angelica's heart by telling her. Angelica has shown the most beautiful spirit, she wrote, and everybody in the hospital thought her perfectly lovely. She left there some months ago, and, of course, she believed that she was going to get well in time. It's funny, isn't it, that the doctor who is attending her now should be so crazy about her? Cousin Fanny says he is one of the most distinguished men in Chicago, but it sounds to me very much as if he were the sort of fool that Alan Wythe was."

"Could the war have changed her? Perhaps she is different now since Alan Wythe was killed?"

Mrs. Timberlake met this with a sound that was between a sniff and a snort. "I expect it's only in books that war, or anything else, makes people over in a minute like that. In real life women like Angelica don't get converted, or if they do, it doesn't last overnight. You can't raise a thunderstorm in a soap bubble. No, Angelica will go on until she dies being exactly what she has always been, and people will go on until she dies and afterwards, believing that she is different. I reckon it would take more than a world war, it would take a universal cataclysm, to change Angelica."

For a time they drove on in silence, and when the housekeeper spoke again it was in a less positive tone. "It wouldn't surprise me if she was sorry now that she ever left David."

Caroline started. "Do you mean she would want to come back?"

"It wouldn't surprise me," Mrs. Timberlake repeated firmly.

"Then she didn't get the divorce?"

"No, she didn't get it, and there wouldn't be any use in her beginning all over again, now that Alan is dead. If she is really as ill as they say, I reckon she'd be more comfortable at Briarlay—even if that doctor out yonder is crazy about her."

"Well, she could find one here who would be just as crazy." There was an accent of bitterness in Caroline's voice.

"Oh, yes, she wouldn't have to worry about that. The only thing that would seem to stand in her way is David, and I don't know that she has ever paid much attention to him."

"Not even as an obstacle. But how can she come back if he doesn't want her?" It really appeared a problem to Caroline.

"Oh, she'll make him want her—or try to——"

"Do you think she can?"

Mrs. Timberlake pondered the question. "No, I don't believe that she can, but she can make him feel sorry for her, and with David that would be half the battle."

"That and Letty, I suppose."

"Yes, she has been writing to Letty very often, and her letters are so sweet that the child has begun to ask when she is coming home. You know how easily children forget?"

Caroline sighed under her breath. "Oh, I know—but, even then, how could Mr. Blackburn?"

"He wouldn't forget. If he thought it was right, he would do it if it killed him, but he would remember till his dying day. That's how David is made. He is like a rock about his duty, and I sometimes think feelings don't count with him at all."

"Yet he did love her once."

"Yes, he loved her once—and, of course," she amended suddenly, reverting to the traditional formula, "Nobody believes that Angelica ever did anything really wrong."

For the rest of the long drive they sat in silence; and it seemed to Caroline, while the car turned into the lane and ran the last half mile to the house, that time had stopped and she was back again in the October afternoon when she had first come to Briarlay. It was no longer a hundred years ago. In the midst of the June foliage—the soft green of the leaves, the emerald green of the grass, the dark olive green of the junipers—in the midst of the wonderful brightness and richness of summer—she was enveloped, as if by a drifting fragrance, in the atmosphere of that day in autumn. It came to life not as a memory, but as a moment that existed, outside of time, in eternity. It was here, around, within, and above her, a fact like any other fact; yet she perceived it, not through her senses, but through an intuitive recognition to which she could not give a name. Under the summer sky she saw again the elm leaves falling slowly; she approached again the red walls in the glimmer of sunset; and she felt again the divine certainty that the house contained for her the whole measure of human experience. Then the car stopped; the door opened; and the scene faded like the vision of a clairvoyant. Imagination, nothing more! She had stepped from the dream into the actuality, and out of the actuality she heard Mrs. Timberlake's dry tones remarking that David had not come home from the office.

"Let me go to Letty. I should like to see Letty at once," said Caroline.

"Then run straight upstairs to the night nursery. I know she will be almost out of her head with joy."

Moses had opened the front door, and as Caroline entered, she glanced quickly about her, trying to discover if there had been any changes. But the house was unaltered. It was like a greenhouse from which the rarest blossom had been removed, leaving still a subtle and penetrating perfume. All the profusion of detail, the dubious taste, the warmth of colour, and the lavishness of decoration, were still there. From the drawing-room she caught the sheen of pink silk, and she imagined for an instant that Angelica's fair head drooped, like a golden lily, among the surroundings she had chosen. There was a lack of discrimination, she saw now even more plainly than on that first afternoon, but there was an abundance of dramatic effect. One might imagine one's self in any character—even the character of an angel—with a background like that!

As she drew near to the nursery door she heard Letty's voice exclaiming excitedly, "There's Miss Meade, mammy, I hear Miss Meade coming!" Then Mammy Riah opened the door, and the next minute the child was stretching out her arms and crying with pleasure.

"I asked father to send for you," she said, "I told him you could make me well faster than Miss Bradley." She appeared to Caroline to have grown unnaturally tall and thin, like the picture of Alice in Wonderland they used to laugh over together. Her face was curiously transparent and "peaked," as Mrs. Timberlake had said, and the flush of fever could not disguise the waxen look of the skin. In her straight little nightgown, which was fastened close at the throat, and with

the big blue bow on the top of her smooth brown head, she looked so wistful and pathetic that she brought a lump to Caroline's throat. Was it any wonder that Blackburn was anxious when she gazed up at him like that?

"I want to hurry up and get well, Miss Meade," she began, "because it makes father so unhappy when I am sick. It really hurts father dreadfully."

"But you're getting well. There isn't much the matter, is there, mammy?"

"She'd be jes ez peart ez I is, ef'n Miss Matty 'ould quit pokin' physic down 'er thoat. Dar ain' nuttin' else in de worl' de matter wid 'er. Whut you reckon Miss Matty know about hit? Ain't she done been teckin' physic day in en day out sence befo' de flood, en ain't she all squinched up, en jes ez yaller ez a punkin, now?"

"I don't mind the medicine if it will make me well," said the child.

"And you take what the doctor gives you too?"

"Oh, yes, I take that too. Between them," she added with a sigh, "there is a great deal to take."

"It is because you are growing so fast. You are a big girl now."

Letty laughed. "Father doesn't want me to get much taller. He doesn't want me to be tall when I'm grown up—but I can't help it, if it keeps up. Do you think I've grown any since the last time I measured, Mammy Riah?"

"Naw, honey, dat you ain't. You ain' growed a winch."

"She means an inch," said Letty. "Some people can't understand her. Even father can't sometimes,

but I always can." Then drawing Caroline down on the bed, she began stroking her arm with a soft caressing touch. "Do you suppose mother will come back now that you have?" she asked. "When you are here she wouldn't have so much trouble. She used to say that you took trouble off her."

"Perhaps she will. You would like to see her, darling?"

The child thought earnestly for a moment. "I'd like to see her," she answered, "she is so pretty."

"It would make you happier if she came back?"

A smile, which was like the wise smile of an old person, flickered over Letty's features. "Wasn't it funny?" she said. "Father asked me that this morning."

A tremor shook Caroline's heart. "And what did you tell him?"

"I told him I'd like her to come back if she wanted to very badly. It hurts mother so not to do what she wants to do. It makes her cry."

"She says she wants to come back?"

"I think she wants to see me. Her letters are very sad. They sound as if she wanted to see me very much, don't they mammy? Somebody has to read them to me because I can read only plain writing. How long will it be, Miss Meade, before I can read any kind, even the sort where the letters all look just alike and go right into one another?"

"Soon, dear. You are getting on beautifully. Now I'll run into my room, and put on my uniform. You like me in uniform, don't you?"

"I like you any way," answered Letty politely. "You always look so fresh, just like a sparkling shower, Cousin Daisy says. She means the sort of

shower you have in summer when the sun shines on the rain."

Going into her room, Caroline bathed her face in cold water, and brushed her hair until it rolled in a shining curve back from her forehead. She was just slipping into her uniform when there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Timberlake said, without looking in,

"David has come home, and he has asked for you. Will you go down to the library?"

"In one minute. I am ready." Her voice was clear and firm; but, as she left the room and passed slowly down the staircase, by the copy of the Sistine Madonna, by the ivory walls of the hall and the pink walls of the drawing-room, she understood how the women felt who rode in the tumbril to the guillotine. It was the hardest hour of her life, and she must summon all the courage of her spirit to meet it. Then she remembered her father's saying, that after the worst had happened, one began to take things easier, and an infusion of strength flowed from her mind into her heart and her limbs. If the worst was before her now, in a little while it would be over—in a little while she could pass on to hospital wards, and the sounds of the battlefield, and the external horrors that would release her from the torment of personal things.

The door of the library was open, and Blackburn stood in the faint sunshine by the window—in the very spot where he had stood on the night when she had gone to tell him that Angelica had ordered her car to go to the tableaux. As she entered, he crossed the room and held her hand for an instant; then, turning together, they passed through the window, and out on the brick terrace. All the way down the stairs she had wondered

what she should say to him in the beginning; but now, while they stood there in the golden light, high above the June splendour of the rose garden, she said only,

"Oh, how lovely it is! How lovely!"

He was looking at her closely. "You are working too hard. Your eyes are tired."

"I must go on working. What is there in the world except work?" Though she tried to speak brightly, there was a ripple of sadness in her voice. Her eyes were on the garden, and it seemed to her that it blazed suddenly with an intolerable beauty—a beauty that hurt her quivering senses like sound. All the magic loveliness of the roses, all the reflected wonder and light and colour of the sunset, appeared to mingle and crash through her brain, like the violent crescendo of some triumphant music. She had not wanted colour; she had attuned her life to grey days and quiet backgrounds, and the stark forms of things that were without warmth or life. But beauty, she felt, was unendurable —beauty was what she had not reckoned with in her world.

"You are going to France?" he asked.

"I am leaving for camp next week. That means France, I hope."

"Until the end of the war?"

"Until the end—or as long as I hold out. I shall not give up."

For the first time she had turned to look at him, and as she raised her lashes a veil of dry, scorching pain gathered before her eyes. He looked older, he looked changed, and, as Mrs. Timberlake had said, he looked as if he had suffered. The energy, the force which had always seemed to her dynamic, was still there in his keen

brown face, in his muscular figure; only when he smiled did she notice that the youth in his eyes had passed into bitterness—not the bitterness of ineffectual rebellion, but the bitterness that accepts life on its own terms, and conquers.

"When I parted from you last autumn," he said suddenly, "I was full of hope. I could look ahead with confidence, and with happiness. I felt, in a way, that the worst was over for both of us—that the future would be better and richer. I never looked forward to life with more trust than I did then," he added, as if the memory of the past were forcing the words out of him.

"And I, also," she answered, with her sincere and earnest gaze on his face, "I believed, and I hoped."

He looked away from her over the red and white roses. "It is different now. I can see nothing for myself—nothing for my own life. Where hope was there is only emptiness."

The sunset was reflected in the shining light of her eyes. "Life can never be empty for me while I have your friendship and can think of you."

By the glow in his face she knew that her words had moved him; yet he spoke, after a moment, as if he had not heard them. "It is only fair that you should know the truth," he said slowly and gravely, "that you should know that I have cared for you, and cared, I think, in the way you would wish me to. Nothing in my life has been more genuine than this feeling. I have tested it in the last year, and I know that it is as real as myself. You have been not only an emotion in my heart—you have been a thought in my mind—every minute—through everything——" He stopped, and still without turning his eyes on her, went on more rapidly, "As

a lover I might always have been a failure. There have been so many other things. Life has had a way of crowding out emotion to make room for other problems and responsibilities. I am telling you this now because we are parting—perhaps for a time, perhaps for ever. The end no one can see——"

Beyond the rose garden, in one of the pointed red cedars down in the meadow, a thrush was singing; and it seemed to her, while she listened, that the song was in her own heart as well as in the bird's—that it was pouring from her soul in a rapture of wonder and delight.

"I can never be unhappy again," she answered. "The memory of this will be enough. I can never be unhappy again."

From the cedar, which rose olive black against the golden disc of the sun, the bird sang of hope and love and the happiness that is longer than grief.

"The end no one can see," he said, and—it may have been only because of the singing bird in her heart—she felt that the roughness of pain had passed out of his voice. Then, before she could reply, he asked hurriedly, "Has Letty spoken to you of her mother?"

"Yes, she talked of her the little while that I saw her."

"You think the child would be happier if she were here?"

For an instant she hesitated. "I think," she replied at last, "that it would be fairer to the child—especially when she is older."

"Her mother writes to her."

"Yes. I think Letty feels that she wishes to come home."

The bird had stopped singing. Lonely, silent, still as the coming night, the cedar rose in a darkening spire against the afterglow.

"For us there can be no possible life together," he added presently. "We should be strangers as we have been for years. She writes me that she has been ill—that there was a serious operation——"

"Have the doctors told her the truth?"

"I think not. She knows only that she does not regain her strength, that she still suffers pain at times. Because of this it may be easier."

"You mean easier because you pity her? That I can understand. Pity makes anything possible."

"I am sorry for her, yes—but pity would not be strong enough to make me let her come back. There is something else."

"There is the child."

"The child, of course. Letty's wish would mean a great deal, but I doubt if that would be strong enough. There is still something else."

"I know," she said, "you feel that it is right—that you must do it because of that."

He shook his head. "I have tried to be honest. It is that, and yet it is not that alone. I wonder if I can make you understand?"

"Has there ever been a time when I did not understand?"

"God bless you, no. And I feel that you will understand now—that you alone—you only among the people who know me, will really understand." For a time he was silent, and when at last he went on, it was in a voice from which all emotion had faded: "Pity might move me, but pity could not drive me to do a thing that will

ruin my life—while it lasts. Letty's good would weigh more with me; but can I be sure—can you, or any one else, be sure that it is really for Letty's good? The doubt in this could so easily be turned into an excuse—an evasion. No, the reason that brings me to it is larger, broader, deeper, and more impersonal than any of these. It is an idea rather than a fact. If I do it, it will be not because of anything that has happened at Briarlay; it will be because of things that have happened in France. It will be because of my year of loneliness and thought, and because of the spirit of sacrifice that surrounded me. If one's ideal, if one's country—if the national life, is worth dying for—then surely it is worth living for. If it deserves the sacrifice of all the youth of the world—then surely it deserves every other sacrifice. Our young men have died for liberty, and the least that we older ones can do is to make that liberty a thing for which a man may lay down his life unashamed."

The emotion had returned now; and she felt, when he went on again, that she was listening to the throbbing heart of the man.

"The young have given their future for the sake of a belief," he said slowly, "for the belief that civilization is better than barbarism, that humanity is better than savagery, that democracy has something finer and nobler to give mankind than has autocracy. They died believing in America, and America, unless she is false to her dead, must keep that faith untarnished. If she lowers her standards of personal responsibility, if she turns liberty into lawlessness, if she makes herself unworthy of that ultimate sacrifice—the sacrifice of her best—then spiritual, if not physical, defeat must await her. The re-

sponsibility is yours and mine. It belongs to the individual American, and it cannot be laid on the peace table, or turned over to the President. There was never a leader yet that was great enough to make a great nation."

As he paused, she lifted her eyes, and looked into his without answering. It was the unseen that guided him, she knew. It would be always the unseen. That was the law of his nature, and she would accept it now, and in the future. "I understand," she said, simply, after a moment.

"It is because you understand," he answered, "because I can trust you to understand, that I am speaking to you like this, from my heart. My dear, this was what I meant when I wrote you that nationality is nothing for personality is everything. Our democracy is in the making. It is an experiment, not an achievement; and it will depend, not on the size of its navy, but on the character of its citizens, whether or not it becomes a failure. There must be unselfish patriotism; there must be sacrifice for the general good—a willing, instead of a forced, sacrifice. There must be these things, and there must be, also, the feeling that the laws are not for the particular case, but for the abstract class, not for the one, but for the many—that a democracy which has been consecrated by sacrifice must not stoop, either in its citizens, or in its Government, to the pursuit of selfish ends. All this must be a matter of personal choice rather than of necessity. I have seen death faced with gladness for a great cause, and, though I am not always strong enough to keep the vision, I have learned that life may be faced, if not with gladness, at least with courage and patience, for a great ideal——"

His voice broke off suddenly, and they were both silent. The sun had gone down long ago, and it seemed to Caroline that the approaching twilight was flooded with memories. She was ready for the sacrifice; she could meet the future; and at the moment she felt that, because of the hour she had just lived, the future would not be empty. Whatever it might bring, she knew that she could face it with serenity—that she was not afraid of life, that she would live it in the whole, not in the part—in its pain as well as in its joy, in its denial as well as in its fulfilment, in its emptiness as well as in its abundance. The great thing was that she should not fall short of what he expected of her, that she should be strong when he needed strength.

She looked up at him, hesitating before she answered; and while she hesitated, there was the sound of hurrying footsteps in the library, and Mrs. Timberlake came through the room to the terrace.

"David," she called in a startled voice. "Did you know that Angelica was coming back?"

He answered without turning. "Yes, I knew it."

"She is here now—in the hall. Did you expect her so soon?"

"Not so soon. She telegraphed me last night."

"Mrs. Mallow met her at the Hot Springs yesterday, and told her that Letty was ill. That brought her down. She has been at the Hot Springs for several weeks."

Blackburn had grown white; but, without speaking, he turned away from the terrace, and walked through the library to the hall. Near the door Angelica was leaning on the arm of a nurse, and as he approached, she broke away from the support, and took a single step forward.

"Oh, David, I want my child! You cannot keep me away from my child!"

She was pale and worn, her face was transparent and drawn, and there were hollows under the grey velvet of her eyes; but she was still lovely—she was still unconquerable. The enchanting lines had not altered. Though her colour had been blotted out, as if by the single stroke of a brush, the radiance of her expression was unchanged, and when she smiled her face looked again as if the light of heaven had fallen over it. Never, not even in the days of her summer splendour, had Caroline felt so strongly the invincible power of her charm and her pathos.

"No, I cannot keep you away from her," Blackburn answered gently, and at his words Angelica moved toward the staircase.

"Help me, Cousin Matty. Take me to her." Abandoning the nurse, she caught Mrs. Timberlake's arm, clinging to her with all her strength, while the two ascended the stairs together.

Blackburn turned back into the library, and, for a moment, Caroline was left alone with the stranger.

"Have you known Mrs. Blackburn long?" asked the other nurse, "she must have been so very beautiful."

"For some time. Yes, she was beautiful."

"Of course, she is lovely still. It is the kind of face that nothing could make ugly—but I keep wondering what she was like before she was so dreadfully thin. You can tell just to look at her what a sad life she has had, though she bears it so wonderfully, and there isn't a word of bitterness in anything that she says. I never knew a lovelier nature."

She passed up the stairs after the others, her arms

filled with Angelica's wraps, and her plain young face enkindled with sympathy and compassion. Clearly Angelica had found another worshipper and disciple.

Alone in the hall, Caroline looked through the library to the pale glimmer of the terrace where Blackburn was standing. He was gazing away from her to the rose garden, which was faintly powdered with the silver of dusk; and while she stood there, with her answer to him still unuttered, it seemed to her that, beyond the meadows and the river, light was shining on the far horizon.

THE END

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